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THE ORIGINALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

BY

H. R. MACKINTOSH, D.D., D.PHIL.

PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, NEW COLLEGE, EDINBURGH

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PREFACE

THE lectures printed in this volume were delivered, on the Haskell Foundation, in the Theological Seminary of Oberlin College, Ohio, in March of this year. No change has been made in the spoken argument except to supply some portions then omitted for lack of time.

To the President and Theological Faculty of Oberlin College I am under a twofold debt of gratitude. In the first place, when in 1915 they honoured me with an invitation to be a Haskell Lecturer and suggested for topic 'The Originality of the Christian Message,' they opened up for me afresh a singularly fruitful field of inquiry, the captivating interest of which went to alleviate the distractions and anxieties arising out of the Great War. I regret exceedingly that an engagement taken for 1917 had for obvious reasons to be postponed to 1920.

And secondly, I cannot easily forget the never-failing kindness shown me during my stay amongst them, or the friendly consideration with which they treated different inquiries and proposals sent to them, from time to time, in these last five years.

My colleague, Professor H. A. A. Kennedy, D.D., D.Sc., has once more given me the inspiring aid of his scholarly and sympathetic criticism, by reading the lectures both in manuscript and in proof and by recommending many improvements of thought and language. The Rev. J. H. Leckie, D.D., in addition to reading critically the whole MS., assisted me from the stores of his special knowledge to correct the balance of what I had at first written about

Philo and the religious ideas of Judaism. To these friends I owe cordial thanks for their kind help and valuable suggestions.

It is my hope that this slight book may stimulate better men to undertake the detailed treatment of a subject which has, till now, suffered a curious neglect. The imperfections of the study now offered, the reader will perhaps be willing to excuse on the principle that first sketches seldom fail to exhibit grave defects of insight and perspective. No full statement of Christian Theology viewed in the light of the Comparative Study of Religions has so far been put forward. And yet the student of religious thought in its historical development could scarcely find a more rewarding theme than the distinctive contribution of the Gospel to the finally coherent view of Faith and Duty.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

New College,
Edinburgh, *April* 1920.

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THE ORIGINALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

LECTURE I

THE MEANING AND IMPLICATIONS OF ORIGINALITY

THE problem to be discussed in the following course of lectures is one of special importance and timeliness. Much less attention than we might have anticipated has been given to the question how far the message of Christianity represents a forward step in the history of religious faith. For many years the more general topic of the indebtedness of Christianity to other religions in respect of worship, institutions, and polity, as well as of concepts or thought-forms, has been the subject of inquiry by the scholars of two hemispheres; but the aspect of the case which most deeply interests the theologian as such has so far suffered a good deal of neglect. At least I should find it hard to mention any volume in any language where the essential originality of the Christian Gospel, with its implied view of God and the world, has been treated of consecutively or in detail. Isolated articles on special points exist in plenty, but a systematic handling of novel elements in the Christian creed as a whole is still lacking. Yet when we have fixed, at all events in principle, the causal or genetic relationships between Christianity and pre-Christian religions, we have no choice but to go on to raise the further question, what features of Christian belief are new, and not merely new but so intensely charged with native truth and power as to entitle Christianity to displace its rivals. It is a matter, any one can see, of crucial moment for the advocate

of foreign missions. 'The nerve of missionary endeavour,' it has been said, 'is the conviction that in the Christian revelation there is something distinctive and vital which the world cannot do without.'[1] This conviction, if we hold it, not merely requires to be justified by argument; it will eventually lead, as we shall find before the close, to an inquiry whether and in what sense Christianity can be described as the final or absolute religion—not only superior to all forerunners and surviving competitors, but destined for, and deserving of, permanent sway over the best human life.

The point of view from which I shall try to approach the subject-matter of these lectures is, let me repeat, that of the theologian, concerned chiefly with the meaning and truth of beliefs. I do not feel myself able to contribute anything to the scientific History of Religions; all I can claim is to have made myself acquainted with the work of some of the best students in that field, only reserving the right to exercise upon their conclusions, where they assume the character of criticism or evaluation, the power of private judgment granted to the humblest of us all. None the less I hope that the discussion may be animated by the historic spirit. In some degree the difficulty of this ought to be eased by the fact that the point of departure adopted here, as well as the standard of reference throughout, is the Gospel in its New Testament or classic form. All the world knows that as Christianity lived on in time it modified and was modified by environing influences, and it would be a very rash person who undertook to decide precisely at what stage these exterior forces came into play. Still, in the words of Burke, 'though no man can draw a stroke between the confines of day and night, yet light and darkness are upon the whole tolerably distinguishable'; and the present argument is meant to bring fresh support to the conviction that it is not fancy, but fact, that the New Testament witness to

[1] J. H. Oldham, *The World and the Gospel*, p. 26.

Christ conveys a religious message which is in a class by itself and cannot be derived by inference or combination from the ideas of any other faith or faiths. How far this would hold good for the Christianity of, say, the year 400, we need not now inquire.

Looking, then, at the mass of religious thought and feeling which prevailed, when Christianity began, throughout the ancient world from the Tiber to the Euphrates, with its Jewish, Hellenistic, and Oriental streams of tendency, let us try to ascertain to what extent the Gospel in its main features is original, and what is the prospect of its being improved upon. It is not antiquarian detail or systematised theology that we shall have in view, but the Evangel itself; the living substance of that redeeming faith which moved and throbbed in the great souls of the first Christian generation; in short, those vital forces that made our religion what it is, and had in them from the outset a prophecy of triumph.

The problem thus sketched is, I need hardly say, not even relatively novel. Essentially it was one theme of the second-century Apologists, and well-known discussions of it abounded in the eighteenth century, though the chief disputants showed very little sense for history. But on the modern mind it bears with a quite peculiar sharpness of impact. The scientific Study of Religions, which has recently made giant strides and has proved of such value to theology in its historic and apologetic branches as permanently to widen our view of the religious life of man, prevents us from assuming so naïvely as our grandfathers did that the Christian faith is unique and independent. God has nowhere left Himself without witness. A great missionary once said that he had never preached the Gospel anywhere without finding that God had been there before him. Not only have there been revelations less adequate than Christianity, but devout souls through these less perfect media were enabled in a real measure to trust God and do His will with an obedient faith to which

the Father surely responds. There has been genuine fruition for such worshippers, not aspiration merely; and the Church has scarcely yet appreciated the width of the charter to hope given by St. Peter's great words, 'In every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him.' [1] By degrees we are learning to conceive of Christianity not as an isolated thing—truth in sheer contrast to ethnic lies—but as the climax and crown of other faiths in their nobler meaning.[2] To describe one religion, however, as 'the climax and crown' of others is clearly to discriminate most positively among religions everywhere in respect of truth and value; it is to apply a standard of excellence or perfection. Hence we cannot too often remind ourselves that the principles of historical research, relating as they must to purely causal issues, are insufficient for these deeper questions of validity. Our conviction, if we have it, that Christianity is the best religion in the world—better, say, than Judaism or Buddhism—is in no sense the fruit of merely scientific or disinterested thought. It is rather the reaction of our whole nature to the spiritual meaning with which the historian's facts are laden. It is a value-judgment, in short, irreducible to terms that express purely causal relationships. And to perceive that things are what they are and not what they come from—in other words, to make a clear distinction between truth and genesis, origin and value—is the first and possibly the last lesson which the student of religious history ought to master.

But before asking whether and in what respects the Christian faith is new, it is necessary to reach some working definition of Christianity itself. What is the Christian message we are thinking of and for which we are

[1] Acts x. 35.

[2] 'The glory of Christianity,' Jowett has said, 'is not to be as unlike other religions as possible, but to be their perfection and judgment.' There is a path to Christ from every other religion, and this means that ethnic faiths can be related positively to Christianity as the goal of all.

claiming this original character? Here lies the formidable problem of the 'Essence of Christianity,' which ever since Harnack's famous lectures in 1899 has been a standing dish at the board of theology. Naturally the discussion has been ardent and intricate. People had to clear up their minds as to the right method for fixing the specific nature of a phenomenon like the Christian religion, and whatever view we take of the likelihood that a general understanding on the point will eventually be reached, at least we have partially realised the immense difficulty of reaching it. A survey of the long debate would carry us far, too far for our present aim; but the question, I am persuaded, is not one to be treated simply by methods of history or induction, and the opposed view seems to me clearly traceable to uncritical assumptions and half-conscious confusions of thought with regard to the principles and the limits of history itself as a scientific discipline. No pretence of scientific rigour can hide the plain fact that we all decide what the essence of Christianity shall mean for us by a judgment of value formed through personal insight or intuition. It is not of course a judgment made irrespectively of the historic data, but from these data we do select the elements or aspects of the many-sided phenomenon known as Christianity which our spiritual experience, in what we feel to be our highest moments, bids us regard as vital. It is so that Harnack himself proceeds, and not Harnack only but his severest critic, Loisy. For my part, I take the Christian religion to mean, in essence, fellowship with God mediated through Jesus Christ. The fellowship is not that of an isolated individual, for no such being exists; it is a fellowship in which others share, for the Christian life is nothing without the mutual giving and receiving of the brethren; none the less it is enjoyed at personal centres of experience, it is a communion of the human spirit with the Father. Also, though on this I cannot now dwell, in such an experience of fellowship between man and God in Christ there is involved, first, a

certain view of the world and, secondly, a certain attitude to the world. This is not an external addition tacked on to the definition given a few lines back, but a simple explanation of what that definition means; for again, just as no isolated person exists, but only persons in society or participant in a common life, so no human life can be out of relation to the world, and fellowship with God becomes an unreal abstraction if the relation to the world alike of God and man is ignored Man lives only in action and interaction with a cosmic environment, and religion, if it is to concern his whole nature, must envisage the whole cosmos in its connection with God.

Christianity then is personal communion with God, mediated through Jesus. It is easy to quote great New Testament expressions of this central thought—expressions which, in Coleridge's phrase,[1] *find* every devout heart. We may take, for instance, the words, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself' (2 Cor. v. 19), declaring the Father's act of self-revelation; and on the other hand, 'Ye who through Him (*i.e.* Christ) are believers in God' (1 Peter i. 21), indicating the response on man's part that constitutes him a Christian. Or if we want a passage to include, along with these two vital features, the not less cardinal fact that Christianity is a brotherhood, we may choose 1 John i. 3: 'It is of what we heard and saw that we bring you word, so that you may share our fellowship; and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ.' Within the bounds of these clear and decisive utterances lie the creative facts and convictions by which our religion lives, and of which every form of theology, even an apostle's, can be no more than a partial interpretation. I will also venture to assume, without that full discussion which the point merits, that

[1] Cf. his impressive remark in his *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (1840): 'In the Bible there is more that *finds* me than I have experienced in all other books put together: the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit.'

this view of what the Christian message is goes back to Jesus. Whatever in the Synoptic record may be uncertain, we know in its main outlines Jesus' thought of God, of man, and of His own function amongst men; we know that He presented Himself to His contemporaries as One who could bring men to the Father. He was sure that in Him God had visited and redeemed His people, and that trust in Him gave life within the Kingdom.

This view of Christianity—a view, I should contend, capable of being expressed without the least technicality of language—I shall venture to use in the lectures which follow. It is sufficiently vouched for by Jesus' own attitude and the reaction to Him of the great believers of the first generation. Not merely is it assumed here that this is authentic Christian religion; it is also assumed that the religion so construed is true. Say what we will, there is no evading the fact that our insight into the Gospel, our sense of its import for ourselves and for human life, is from first to last dependent on faith.[1] To ignore this, even in a scientific argument, must be ranked as a formal and delusive affectation. We may have been taught to appreciate all that is rich and wonderful in religious history, yet in the end believe that there is but one pearl of great price.

Now it is by no means unreasonably optimistic to hold that the Christian message, so defined, is, in the broad sense of the word, original. How indeed can this be questioned? Every religion that made history has been

[1] 'It is to the moral and religious man himself that we must go, not to the philosopher weaving theories about him, if we are to understand his experience aright. The religious man's account of his experience may be overlaid with accretions and survivals of primitive custom and belief, and on these accessories philosophical criticism and historical research have their legitimate work to do. But the fundamental presuppositions of any experience must be accepted from the experience itself; they may be explained, but not explained away' (Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God*, p. 252). Goethe's lines recur:

'Wer den Künstler will verstehen,
Muss in Künstlers Lande gehen.'

the outcome of new, independent forces. Buddhism, Parsism, Orphism—these and other faiths are manifestly original in two respects. They struck out new conceptions of the Ultimate Reality, and they recommended a new attitude to this Reality on the part of man. It needs to be said that the paltry ambition to dissect each fresh religious movement into so many minor factors, all traced meticulously in turn to previous developments, is ruinous to genuine research, for it bars out the very notion of progress, of Divine creative evolution. There is a well-known story of the antiquarian who, after showing to a sculptor friend how one by one the characteristic features of Greek sculpture had been anticipated by the Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Hittites, exclaimed in triumph that the Greeks had in fact invented nothing. 'Nothing,' rejoined the other, 'except the beautiful.' The past is made unintelligible when we freeze up human life in immobility and expel the fact of growth. Each great religion, felt and lived by from within, can finally be explained only by itself, never in terms of something else. If indeed there is no advance, why should religions differ? Everywhere the mystery of individual life confronts us. And scholarship is called, by self-interest if by no higher motive, to rid itself of this futile and narrow prejudice according to which no new formation can emerge in religious history because new formation is opposed to the nature of the world. Life, fortunately, will always laugh this *a priori* axiom to scorn.

It is a mistake, however, from which the investigation of primitive Christianity is suffering badly, just at present. Every one knows what happens constantly in the study of St. Paul. When apparently new ideas turn up in the apostle's thinking, then, if they cannot be accounted for by the influence of Judaism, they are at once set down as presumably of pagan origin, and the possibility that they sprang from the apostle's unprecedented personal experience—his conversion, let us say—is scarcely glanced

at. Against this quite unreal simplification of life we must steadily be on our guard. When taken seriously it is the death of human interest. It would be strange, then, if there were nothing new in Jesus, since so much is new in Socrates, in Gautama, in Zarathustra. Call the Founder of Christianity only a prophet, and implicitly you have predicated novelty of Him, for prophets do more than echo the past ; they bring new gains of truth. They build on that which has been, but always they build higher.

As historians, therefore, and apart from all questions of truth or value, we are entitled to claim that the Christian message is a specifically new thing. It stands out from the level of its antecedents at least as boldly as Judaism from other forms of Semitic worship. To be frank, how extremely little the Gospel, *qua* Gospel, owes to other faiths! Doubtless this has now and then been overlooked in the charmed delight with which certain scholars have handled the new tools furnished by the comparative Study of Religions,[1] but, when we have time to breathe and look round again, how we invariably find that only in the most minor details can any feature of Biblical religion at its highest be accounted for by what is outside the Bible. Alleged ethnic parallels to the Christian message uniformly prove to be charged only in a faint degree with the faith-evoking and life-imparting power that resides in truth as truth is in Jesus. The statement that Christianity is, at bottom, a patchwork of the best things in ancient worships may for a moment seem an imposing generalisation ; come a little closer, examine the points that really count, and it fades in vacuity. Jesus, at the lowest, is the initiator of a new religious movement.

[1] The general thesis which such writers have sought to maintain is contained in Gunkel's well-known statement that 'the religion of the New Testament, in its origin and shaping, fell under the influence of alien religions in important points, and even in some points that are essential' (*Zum religionsgesch. Verständnis d. N. T.*, p. 1).

From the beginning, indeed, Christian believers were conscious that the faith into which they had entered marked a new religious era. They had been touched by creative facts. It is true that the early chapters of Acts reveal an initial tendency to believe that between Judaism and Christianity there existed no radical antagonism, one faith being simply the legitimate development of the other. But this soon passed. Even before St. Paul it was clearly understood that faith in a crucified Messiah is a definite innovation, and the apostle himself proclaims without disguise that Judaism is a different religion, which must be left behind. As Professor E. F. Scott has put it, 'We can scarcely overestimate the importance, for the whole future of Christianity, of this early conflict with a spiritual religion, so nearly akin to itself. It was thereby compelled to realise its own distinctive nature.' [1] And much of the interest of the New Testament for a student lies in the fact that it records a great battle between the living forces of Christianity and the death and life forces of the non-Christian religions of the time. In their deepest motives Hellenism and Christianity were poles apart, and the first missionaries were taught by the felt opposition of their new faith and paganism (in its broad and permanent characteristics) ever and again to explore the infinite blessing given in the person of Christ. We can perceive, as Professor D. S. Cairns has said, that 'the whole Apostolic view grew out of the twofold endeavour of those first missionaries of the Church to meet what was deep and true in the other religions, and to guard against the perils which arose from the spell which these earlier religions still cast upon the minds of those who had been delivered from them into the larger life of the Gospel. Thus it was under the pressure of these spiritual labours that the latent riches of the Divine salvation were brought to light.' [2]

[1] *The Apologetic of the New Testament*, p. 12.
[2] *Reports of the World Missionary Conference* (1910), vol. iv. p. 215.

This however is not the equivalent of saying that the Christian religion—its faith, its promise, its ethical and social impulse—were new from end to end. It does not, like Coriolanus, 'stand as if a man were author of himself and knew no other kin.' The nature of the human mind precludes this, as well as the continuity of history. In studying its content our thought sways to either side alternately as we accentuate the essential originality of the Gospel, and on the other hand emphasise the vital connection between the various stages in the development of religion. Quite apart from the Old Testament, Christianity was by no means original in its *problems*—in its sense, that is, for those human troubles, those evils of sin, ignorance, and sorrow over which mankind has always bent in agony. We have only to listen to the desperate experiments of supplication audible in the higher literature of paganism to perceive that the Gospel, while intensifying the consciousness of sin, was not the first voice to tell man that he is a sinner. What it brings is a more simple, ethical, and satisfying message of how the sinful may become right with God. Nor was the new faith wholly original in some of its *ideas or phrases*. However conscious we may be of the 'authentic rush and thrill with which the redeeming reality broke upon the first century,' we must register the fact that already there had been faintly sketched the contour or outline of what, had it been filled in by life-giving revelation, might in some real degree have satisfied man's need. Seekers after God had raised their hands to heaven and prayed for salvation; they had conceived of Divine grace, the necessity of a mediator, the power of adoring faith to bind man to God the Saviour in a fellowship of obedience and love. But for this long *preparatio evangelica*, Christian preaching throughout the Empire must have cast the seed on stony ground. The missionary to primitive races has always felt that his first task, perhaps his hardest, is to create those moral ideas, those habits of spiritual thought and imagination

apart from which the Gospel cannot be appreciated. An adequate ethical currency must first be put in circulation if the new truth is to make way. In various circles this currency, as we have called it, had been provided by the achievements of Graeco-Roman thought. 'Christianity,' Baur has said, 'came at a time when the heathen world had come to feel the profound significance of the moral consciousness, and all that was most spiritual and most practically important in the results arrived at during the long course of Greek ethical speculation had become the common belief, the essential contents of the mind of the age. All men now recognised the truth that man was a moral being called to devote his life to fulfilling a moral task.'[1] Long before Christ men had familiarised each other with ideas of revelation, of incarnation, of atonement and sacrament;[2] and some few prophetic souls scattered up and down the years had foretold a day when these higher dreams would be fulfilled.

It is accordingly an error to think of pre-Christian antiquity as barren, not to say bankrupt, in spiritual impulse, or of Christianity as called to the easy task of filling a mere void. New Testament allusions to pagan worship are more often hostile than not, yet it also tells how St. Paul at Athens spoke of one God whom men, even though ignorantly, adored, and the Fourth Gospel with an even grander universality points to 'the real Light, which enlightens every man.' The Fathers, especially the earlier amongst them, carried on this partially sympathetic tradition, as in Justin Martyr's verdict on the nobler Greek spirit, or Tertullian's well-known phrase, *Seneca saepe noster*.[3] The spots of light in paganism are indeed often isolated, like sparks in smouldering paper; con-

[1] *Church History*, vol. i. p. 17.

[2] But what Christianity had in common with its environment is construed freshly, what it brought as Gospel of its own it gave away to be the general riches of mankind: τὰ κοινὰ καινῶς, τὰ καινὰ κοινῶς.

[3] Plato was recognised by some of the Greek Fathers as ranking with the Minor Prophets; he wrote, says Clement of Alexandria, by the inspiration of God, ἐπιπνοίᾳ Θεοῦ (*Cohort. ad gentes*, 180A).

tinuous development for the most part is lacking; while in many ethnic faiths, those of India for example, degeneration seems a very fate, the brightest propects being quickly overcast and the truest forms soiled again. And in the very greatest souls faith is found to be constantly accompanied, indeed all but destroyed, by a haunting sense of failure. None the less, if we are to do justice to the environment of early Christianity, we must see it not in bare contrast to the new religion but in the light of its own ideals. Christian faith, it is quite certain, triumphed through its inherent superiority to its rivals, not because these rivals were wholly vile or foolish.[1] The one fair method, moreover, is to acknowledge frankly the absurdity of comparing the worst practices of the lower pagans, not with the actual life of the Christian multitude, but with the loftiest and unapproached ideals of the foremost Christian teachers. Realities on one side must be put against realities on the other, ideals against ideals. Beneficence, gentleness, purity, social virtue, humanity, peace were not unknown in the pagan world, or the classics would not for centuries have formed the basis of Western education. And though it is misleading to say, with Farrer, that 'a man may derive more mental and spiritual profit, higher aspirations for virtue, toleration, and humanity, from Seneca or Marcus Aurelius than from writers like Augustine and Tertullian'[2]—mis-

[1] In a suggestive essay on 'The Attitude of Faith to the History of Religions' (*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1918, pp. 272-91) Stephan points out how St. Paul varies his point of view in speaking of Gentile religion. Polytheistic worship roused his indignation as simply ungodly (Rom. i. 21-23). But in the thoughtful religion of the time there are elements he can acknowledge: heathenism itself furnishes proof that the power and attributes of God are irresistibly impressed on the mind by nature (i. 19 f.), His will is declared in the witness of conscience (ii. 14 f.). The apostle's general argument in these two chapters implies that he could find a place for the religion of both Jew and Gentile in a great divine plan, with real revelation on the second side of the contrast as well as the first. It looks as if he would not have found it very hard to say explicitly that all religion is in its measure capable of being interpreted teleologically, *i.e.* it educates men for Christ.

[2] *Paganism and Christianity*, p. xii.

leading, because Jesus and not Tertullian or Augustine is our guide in fixing what Christianity is—still the protest is a not unnatural one, and may well caution us against partisan excess. Paganism at its best must be our standard of comparison. Nor ought we to forget that, as every reader of Plato and Virgil knows, ancient like modern writers may have long outgrown the crude primary sense of old religious phrases which they still use without concern.

Clearly we are working in a field where everything depends on light and shade, on the precise distribution of accent. 'La vérité,' says Renan, 'consiste dans les nuances.' Any picture in pure black and white is wrong: Christianity comes to fulfil as well as destroy. In part its originality lies in its unequalled power to absorb and perpetuate the finest things of the past. Yet it is also bound to scourge and expose evil with that high moral jealousy which is essential if, to reverse the French saying, the good is not to prove the enemy of the best. Man is made for God, and towards God antiquity had long been groping, not without success; but the Gospel is far from being merely a deposit of the Time-Spirit, and one quite certain prescription for making the New Testament unintelligible is to overlook the fact that life in Jesus Christ is a distinctive thing. In recent debate, the word 'syncretism' has been tossed about at random. In strictness, you can speak of syncretism only when the contributions to religious thought made by different faiths are admitted on equal terms; and whatever may be the truth about marginal details, to say that in the Gospel of the New Testament the ideas of Judaism or Hellenism rank as of equal importance with the redemptive significance of Jesus is to put oneself out of court. In the life, death, and victory of Jesus Christ a new standard of reality and value had risen before the human mind, antiquating its predecessors, and it plainly forbade the young religion to be anything so facile or so uninspiring as an eclectic version of paganism.

Christ, says the apostle, came forth 'in the fulness of the times.' These old deep words are filling with light and meaning as our knowledge of the past extends. Apologists of the second century saw that the Gospel had appeared at a moment when converging lines met from every side. 'How,' asks Origen, 'was it possible for the gospel doctrine of peace, which does not permit men to take vengeance even upon enemies, to prevail throughout the world, unless at the advent of Jesus a milder spirit had been everywhere introduced?'[1] Human life had gained a higher unity. The prosperity of the Empire had culminated; peace overspread the earth; and the political universalism of the imperial régime, by sweeping across barriers raised by keen national sentiment, had made it popularly credible that one religion—a single great all-embracing faith—was the destined accompaniment of Empire. There prevailed a belief, exemplified in the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil, that some blessed age of gold would speedily return to seal the spiritual unity of the nations and give satisfaction to the loftier feeling of mankind. Greece had made its intellectual culture—its philosophy and rhetoric—the common possession of the world. Its speech formed the medium of civilised thought. Next indeed to the religious teaching of the Old Testament, Greek philosophy is the most important forerunner of Christian faith. Further, the spread of Judaism from land to land evinced the preparedness of higher minds for a religion that should be ethical from end to end. Up to a certain point, the Jewish Diaspora broke the way for Christianity. On all sides a cry was heard for new divine life, for a faith that could save all men and save their whole nature. To a large extent State religion had sunk in formalism. Many had taken to the assiduous cultivation of inward spiritual experience, and this nurture of the soul obviously made religion in an ever greater degree the subject of free choice, in a

[1] *adv. Celsum*, ii. 30.

tension deepened and quickened by the presence of numerous competing cults. Ever since Alexander the Great, the belief had been widespread that at the basis of all national religions lay one true universal faith, and philosophical reflection lent its aid to this tendency to reconcile, to simplify, to spiritualise.[1] Along with this went a distinct movement towards monotheism, which, rationalistic though it was, drew inspiration from 'a rationalism which had dug its trenches wide and deep and only waited for rain from heaven to fill them.' Thus, as Professor Angus has expressed it, 'the Gospel of Jesus could not have come at a better time to find men in serious mood. Men were living in a dangerous transition stage—between collectivism and individualism, between a cramping *polis* and a universal state, between a political and a personal-ethical religion, between the religion of nature and that of revelation.'[2] A new sense of life and death had gone abroad, a new readiness to weigh their tremendous issues. Pessimism and world-weariness crept from soul to soul. The value, the claims, the loneliness of the individual insisted on being recognised. Emperor-worship bore witness to the craving for a present deity. An old civilisation was at the point of death, and men longed for the living air of a new time.

Thus, in singular resemblance to the Far East to-day, what the student of later antiquity finds unrolled before his eyes is the swift break-up of ancestral faiths, leading men to scorn what had long been revered and sweeping them abruptly into vast and incalculable world-movements. In the first century B.C., the varied religions of nature, crowded with inscrutable sorceries and childish rites, gave little satisfaction to that large part of society which sought a religion based on conscience and was looking round for a safe foothold for moral life amid the collapse of what had been believed secure. Old worships and

[1] Cf. Wendland, *Hellenistische-Römische Kultur*, p. 149.
[2] *Environment of Early Christianity*, p. 68.

old morals were losing hold steadily, with nothing so far in sight to take their place. Tradition crumbled; disastrous effects on conduct followed; and increasingly a bitter need was felt for something solid on which to build life—a new trustworthy authority in religion which should declare not only what man is to believe concerning God but what duty God requires of man.[1] Belief in the State religion was dead or dying. It did not occur to Greek or Roman to ask direction of a priest in matters of duty, for religion and conduct had no bearing on each other. Many, too, were fatigued by scepticism, and not a few of these were disposed to welcome gratefully the idea of a Divine revelation able to enlarge the scope of spiritual knowledge and relieve the painful solitude of the interior life. On all the deepest things men were uncertain, with that pathetic, hesitating uncertainty to which, centuries before, Plato had given expression in one of the most haunting passages in Greek literature, where, after urging that a man should persist until he has discovered or been taught the truth, 'or,' he continues, 'if this be impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human theories, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life—not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him.'[2] To quench this thirst for assurance something not wholly unreal was done. Men owed most, perhaps, to itinerant preachers and notable directors of the spiritual life—those striking and often earnest figures whom we read of as going barefoot and penniless, with scanty robe and simple staff, through city and countryside, moved by the sense of a divine mission to be the physicians of sick souls. Like

[1] The seat of authority must be new, for as has been well said, 'in so far as in fact the external sanctions fall away and cease to be determinants of men's conduct, it is no use any more herding them back to these, and attempting to supply them with motives. They may attain to a new unity of life—they cannot regain the old' (R. M. Maciver, *Community*, p. 300).

[2] *Phaedo*, c. 85.

officers of the Salvation Army, they found an audience in street or cross-roads or market-place, and they sowed beside all waters.[1] All in all, it was a moral crisis for humanity. Men laid their ear to the ground and strove to pierce the future. If only there might emerge a religious authority, sure, real, and near to the mind, giving peace to troubled consciences and lifting at the least a corner of death's estranging veil!

At this point only the briefest mention can be made of the many-coloured Syncretistic phenomena. Syncretism here means that romantic intermixture of old Greek religion with the Oriental cults which reached its acme in the first century after Christ, but had long been ripening. In great measure it was due to the racial blending consequent on the political rearrangements of Alexander and his successors. It also stood for an attempt to provide that serious, universal, and transcendent or supramundane religion which, as we have seen, was the object of dim, if passionate, longing. At a later stage we shall have to scrutinise the view of redemption fostered by the emotional mystic cults of Phrygia and Egypt that poured into the Graeco-Roman world—those cults 'which promised so much, which struck so many universal human chords, which seemed to master that supernatural which is the deep upon which human life floats in every age.' Many of them were at first gross and orgiastic, but as time elapsed they seemed to 'suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange.' Such were the Magna Mater from Anatolia, Isis and Serapis from Egypt, Mithra from Persia. Ritual was their secret. In every case the ritual was imposing, with such elaborate symbolism as might be counted on to excite and sustain curiosity. They insisted on asceticism, yet had something for the lower nature; they were care-

[1] For the other side of the picture, the corruption in which much of the popular religious teaching was involved, cf. Glover, *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, chap. i. Note also how in 1 Thess. ii. 1-9, St. Paul repudiates the idea that the apostolic propaganda was a secret scheme for making money.

fully adjusted to the myths and pantheon of Hellas; they professed to solve enigmas and cure disease; they threw open the door of the world to come. Their popularity is not wonderful. At a time when men were trying every means to get rid of sin, conceived of as really more than half physical, these Oriental worships came forward promising deliverance from sin and death by enabling the votary to share the very life of Godhead, for the most part through sacramental media. With all their faults, they diffused an atmosphere of enthusiasm and hope very grateful to the jaded soul, and, in spite of imposture and immorality often clustering thick about them, they appealed to many a profound and ineradicable need which old political worships, so coldly impersonal, had left untouched. We cannot doubt that as the members gathered, in pious guild and brotherhood, to contemplate the symbols of deity and to join in hymn and ritual, many gained real help for a truer and better life.

As we stand away from the host of rival faiths crowding the civilised world in the first century, seeking the right perspective and marking features in which our religion is original, it is obvious we need not compare it with each ethnic faith in turn, right down the list. That would be labour lost. Only a few Gentile worships need even be considered, but these are of the highest importance. For one thing, the endless multiplicity of religious forms can eventually be reduced to a few main types, which repeat themselves with fair regularity; for another, the fact that Christianity belongs to the class of religions which may be called personalistic, in contrast to pantheistic, renders it quite unnecessary to raise the question of its dependence, for anything like constitutive factors, on a religion such as Buddhism.[1] Again, it would clearly be superfluous to raise questions of comparative originality be-

[1] For historical questions of possible Buddhistic influences, cf. Garbe, *Indien und das Christentum*, pp. 12-61.

tween Christianity and such faiths as Shintoism or Jainism. By all spiritual standards of value these had themselves been long outstripped by other non-Christian faiths in purity of intention and moral dynamic. Possibly the indigenous religion of Rome is as good an example as we require of the sort of faith to which Christianity could never by any chance have owed anything. Roman, like all pagan, religion was a rite rather than a doctrine; still less was it a doctrine sprung from and fed by history, or binding the faith of the worshipper. No place existed for conscience, or for the sense of truth. There the State said: This is what you must all do, but each may think as he likes. Let the devotee only perform the proper ceremonial, and perform it properly, and he was free to explain it or leave it unexplained as he pleased; the cultivated sceptic adhered to religious forms no less closely than the ignorant masses to their own superstitions. The gods, for a Roman, were so to speak inhabitants of Rome, and in any case were not personal beings but the functional forces of nature. They were worshipped on political grounds, not God but the State being the chief end. To quote Mr. Warde Fowler: 'A Roman's interest was centred in the cult rather than in the objects of it; a tendency against which it was the mission of the Hebrew prophets unceasingly to contend, as destructive in the long run of the noblest ideas of God and His relations to His people.'[1] It is the crucial instance of a religion ruined by utility.

In like manner it is unnecessary on our plan to make fine distinctions between the Oriental cults flourishing in the first century. No jealousy existed between them, and hardly any proselytism. The Empire demanded no more than that each should keep his own faith provided he did nothing to insult other modes of worship. In fact, the notion of a religion for humanity inspired by moral principles is wholly foreign to ancient civilisation,

[1] *Roman Ideas of Deity*, p. 11.

whether Greek or Roman. Harnack makes the comment on Neoplatonism that 'it lacked the power of exclusiveness, and of that lack it died.'[1] Such tolerance is often praised, but in truth it entails a neutrality on moral questions that was eventually bound to poison the wells of life. Not a few Indian cults show the same easy accommodation, partly for intellectual, partly for climatic reasons. How far otherwise it is with Judaism and Christianity! Both faiths stood based on history, both were moral to the core; hence in things of the spirit both exhibited a noble and intransigent jealousy which is but one side of the loftiest personal conviction. Neither for one moment could have agreed to regard the highest good of man, or the unity or character of Almighty God, as an open question. These were matters for which at any hour the martyr might well die.

It appears then that the non-Christian religions we shall have to reckon with are, upon the whole, tolerably few—chiefly Judaism, Hellenism (including the Oriental cults), and in a much less degree Zoroastrianism and later Buddhism. If Christianity is an original faith, it is so in contrast to the religions I have named, which themselves mark the highest points to which previous religious life and thought had attained and form the serious contemporary efforts to grapple with the mysteries of life and death. Also at one point we shall find it useful to refer to the attractive Indian doctrine of 'bhakti.' Islam, as a younger faith than Christianity, is of course outside our field.

Very slight reflection proves that our most serious difficulty will lie in gauging the relation of Christianity to Hebrew religion as a whole. In many respects Jesus and His followers simply carried on the older faith, and the apostles were able to read the Old Testament as, in essentials, a Christian book. Much of Jeremiah, of

[1] Quoted by Macnicol, *Indian Theism*, p. 263.

Deutero-Isaiah, and of the Psalms is evangelical in every line. Thus it was impossible to discard the old thought of Divine righteousness, or the vital interdependence of religion and morality, or the estimate of sin, or the temper of unconquerable hope. Monotheism and missionary zeal were taken over as of course. There can obviously be no question of novelty here precisely as in other cases. In a variety of ways Old Testament religion and Christianity have to be viewed as forming a single unified development, in which the former faith reaches its completion in the later, and in the contrast with non-Christian religions they stand or fall together. Nevertheless, the evolution of Bible religion is a long one, with stages both low and high, and even, it may be, with periods of retrogression; and it is at its highest point, and only there, that we are interested in it now. The problem before us, to be quite exact, is this: How far, and in what respects, are we justified in claiming originality for Biblical religion in its culminating and most characteristic form?

To settle accounts with Judaism, meaning thereby post-canonical developments of Hebrew faith, is easier. On the whole, Judaism reveals no remarkable advance on the best things in the Old Testament, except in a new sense of the value of the individual, a clearer working-out of belief in immortality (though here it is doubtful if there is any advance on the intuitions of prophet and psalmist), and in Philo, it may be held, a firmer grasp of the universality of God. There is no need to say that Judaism sank to a far lower plane, but it did not rise. Its incurable tendency to replace faith by works, by measured obedience to an external law is, to say the least, no gain for the man who has learnt religion from the prophets.[1] Hence when the God-fearers who had been

[1] It is interesting to recall at this point the grounds on which Ritschl went solely to the New Testament for the materials of Christian doctrine. 'The knowledge,' he says, 'possessed by the apostles and New Testament writers of the content, character, and divine founding of Christianity,

attracted by Jewish worship and won for an essentially Rabbinic form of faith were brought through St. Paul in contact with the Christian Gospel, they realised instantly that it offered a larger religious life than they had shared in the synagogue, and one in which racial privilege could no longer count for anything. The Church itself was from the very outset aware of the difference. To speak even of the first Christian society in Jerusalem as 'a mere sect of Judaism' is quite misleading. 'Outwardly, it is true, the disciples remained faithful to the Law, but they regarded it as secondary and non-essential. They were conscious, long before the days of St. Paul, that they stood for a new conception of religion which had little in common with the reigning Judaism.' [1] On the other hand, they felt an instinctive kinship with the saints of the Old Testament. Like Jesus, they went back to Deuteronomy and Isaiah and the Psalms for truth on which the soul could live.

And yet, even when put in comparison with the older revelation, Christ is a new advance. A high religion may in various ways become higher still: it may reach a more satisfying view of God, a more thoroughgoing moralisation of faith,[2] a completer universality of appeal. In these ways as in others Christianity signalised its novelty over against the faith of the prophets. This is a matter we shall later have to treat of in detail, and I shall pass from it for the moment. But it is worth while pointing out that the Christian propaganda failed or prospered in proportion as the fresh data for religion present in Jesus were studiously concealed or openly proclaimed. A striking instance is St. Paul's address at Athens. Even if this address be regarded as a free composition of St.

as also the thought of Christ Himself, is distilled through a genuine understanding of Old Testament religion, which contemporary Judaism lacks' (*Rechtfertigung*, ii. pp. 15 f.).

[1] E. F. Scott, *Beginnings of the Church*, p. 273.

[2] Even the idea of miracle was moralised (Heinrici, *Die Eigenart des Christentums*, p. 18).

Luke, it contains much that is purely Jewish, while much more would have been congenial to a monotheistically minded Greek philosopher. Doubtless it sheds light on problems which had baffled heathen wisdom. In place of gods, who are really men, the apostle speaks of the transcendent spirituality to be ascribed to the one only true God ; a God afar off he replaces by One in whom we live and move and have our being ; primal chaos yields to Divine creation ; history read as a confused welter of chance or fate takes the aspect of Providence guiding each race and people to its goal ; instead of the proud distinction of Greek and barbarian is set the vast compassionate truth that all men are one in nature and blood. But at no point is publicity given to the distinctive Christian message ; and (if the speech be authentic) it is neither priggish nor fanciful to find in this studied omission of the Cross an explanation alike of St. Paul's comparative failure in Athens and his subsequent change of front at Corinth. There, as he writes, emphatically and it may be penitently, 'I determined to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ the crucified.' The Gospel has lost its savour when it is merged in Jewish commonplace.

We may assume that in Christianity, as in other epoch-making faiths, it is the new elements that tell most. Some thinkers—Schleiermacher is a good example—who began by placing supreme value on what is common to all the best religions, have ended in the discovery that the really important things are found only in Jesus. If the Church's experience is sound, a new and distinctive life has become available in Christ, through fellowship with whom we obtain an exceptional religious blessing not to be gained elsewhere : an unprecedented kind of union with God is now possible, with new and newly-based certainties and hopes. The orientation of faith is new in quality. So is its emotional tone. I am now speaking of the Gospel in its classic form, as expressed, say, in the eighth chapter

of Romans. For it certainly cannot be denied that with the lapse of time there streamed into Church thought and practice only too many elements of pagan syncretism, and these, too, not always the best. The flow of life was again soiled with incorrigible Jewish legalism, the magic of mystery cults, the morals of pre-Christian history. Yet behind all these accretions the Gospel persists, and it is of singular interest to perceive how once and again the Church has displayed an extraordinary power of regaining truth to type—of cleansing and replenishing its own life by a return to the first springs of light and love. It has gone back to Christ and taken from Him a quickened faith. Such rejuvenescence is explicable solely by the fact that the birth of Christianity represented the outbreak, or rather the inbreak, of ultimate creative forces, flowing from a source thenceforward accessible to man ; and from these new, irreducible powers it has derived what of victorious truth and energy its progress has revealed. Thus when we gaze into the future, questioning our own mind as to what religion may one day become, it is not, as with Pfleiderer, some far-off fusion of Christianity and Buddhism that we see or long for ; it is a fuller understanding, a larger and more obedient reception, of truth as it is in Jesus.

We conclude, therefore, that novelty of a Divine order and magnitude is the very signature of the Gospel, and that no other view is consistent with the genius of Christianity as it appears in its earliest days. But in saying this, let us not assume indolently that we have yet discovered how far this novelty extends, or what fields of life it may yet cover. There is still more truth to break out from the great facts on which Christianity is built. The Gospel is thoroughly definite ; but it is quick with life, and like all living things it exists not as a finished immobile entity, but as a vital impulse never to be spent. To one age it has given a new sense of God, to another a fresh ideal of personal devotion, to a third a social con-

science. If notoriously it had bestowed its all, we should know that its staying power had gone; it would have exposed its strictly ephemeral character as plainly as the worship of Isis. But perhaps the greatest thing in Christianity is that you never know what it will do next. At any moment it may break out at a new place—seizing on some imperfectly evangelised aspect of life and moulding it to a higher likeness, unveiling new possibilities of brotherhood, pushing forward its front, with all the implied promise of faith and hope and love, over soils unoccupied before. Can we say that we have as yet understood anything more than a fraction of the religious significance, not to say the theological suggestiveness, of modern missionary enterprise? Hence, I repeat, when we are inquiring whether Christianity is to be regarded, in the light of history, as a distinctively new thing, let us make quite sure that we have allowed enough for its unexplored potentialities, its inherent creative powers. Let us recollect that the *gesta Christi* are a never-ceasing revelation of Christ Himself, and that, since it holds as true of a religion as of any other fact that the cause is defined through its effects, the definition of Christianity is in this sense as yet incomplete. A final definition, indeed, is not possible, for knowledge of the Gospel grows in clearness and fulness as faith increasingly receives it, and character is moulded by its power. The world has so far seen only a part of what it can do. But this progressiveness of our faith, far from being incongruous with its finality, is the proper and living consequence of it. Whereas every other historic and prophetic religion makes progress by transcending its Founder, Christianity has grown in life and power in exact proportion as from time to time it recovers touch with Jesus, submits more loyally to His will, and accepts with a deeper gratitude the life of sonship He imparts.

In this lecture I have discussed a number of preliminary

topics which it was convenient to take together—none of them trivial, and all of them, as you must feel, such as deserve a much more careful scrutiny than I have been able to apply. In future lectures I hope to single out what appear to be the main constitutive aspects or elements of Christianity, both as a revelation and an experience, and subject them to more detailed examination, with a view to ascertaining how far it is correct to describe them as unparalleled and original. These features are, first, the Christian thought of God, next the Divine saving action, then redemption as a form of experience, and finally the Christian ethic. All these four are vital, and no others, as far as I can see, are so vital as they are; nor can the four reasonably be reduced to a less number. Thereafter it will be proper to ask, in the light of our conclusions, whether Christianity so interpreted is the absolute or final religion for man, or marks only one stage in the evolution of his higher life. What grounds have we as believers in Christ for holding that it might not be superseded to-morrow? And are these grounds valid exclusively for faith, or can they be stated in terms that perforce carry conviction to every normal mind?

The comparative Study of Religions is not in some ways a study in which Christians have found it easy, or at first rewarding, to engage. Alien religions have seemed to many the work of the devil, and a close acquaintance with them to savour of plain disloyalty to Christ; to others the toil of scholarship has looked hardly worth while, and others still are tempted off from gaining convictions of their own by the drowning of mind and memory in a flood of historical detail. But once we have started, the fascination of the thing is endless. The gain for faith is seen to be rich and manifold. Not merely do we rise above the simple but unhappy method of explaining everything outside Christendom by human error or wickedness, but we realise freshly how incurably religious a being is man, and how constant has been the

pressure of God's seeking love upon His blinded and dying children.

'Children of men! the Unseen Power, whose eye
For ever doth accompany mankind,
Hath look'd on no religion scornfully
That man did ever find.

Which has not taught weak wills how much they can?
Which has not fall'n on the dry heart like rain?
Which has not cried to sunk self-weary man: '
Thou must be born again?'[1]

[1] Matthew Arnold, *Progress*.

LECTURE II

THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF GOD

In all higher religions, with the exception of primitive Buddhism, the centre round which the worship and faith of men have taken shape is the thought of Deity, the unseen Power or Powers believed to be in control of human life, and sought after by the votary as friends or allies. Whether a particular religion does or does not impart satisfaction and moral energy depends all but entirely on its view of the Divine, on the light in which it sees the purpose and character of the Supreme. Conversely, changes in the thought of God are followed slowly if surely (most slowly of all in eschatology) by changes in other beliefs, and in the rites to which these beliefs give rise. It is accordingly at this point that our study of detail must begin. We have to ask in what respects the God of the Bible is justly conceived as loftier in comparison with pre-Christian theisms. In this inquiry we shall do well to recall the notable words in which Mr. Glover fixes the right point of view. 'There is one striking difference,' he says, 'between Christianity and the other religions, in that the others start with the idea that God is known. Christians do not so start. We are still exploring God on the lines of Jesus Christ—rethinking God all the time, finding Him out. That is what Jesus meant us to do.' [1]

Where lies the newness of the Christian idea of God? The answer given at once by a large class of Christians

[1] *The Jesus of History*, p. 72.

would be to the effect that the fresh element is the conception of the Trinity. In a sense this is quite true. If we go to the New Testament and to Christian experience, we find both declaring that to express all that believers mean by God we must say Father, Son, and Spirit. Leave out the redeeming Son of God, or the principle of Divine life and power named Holy Spirit, both of which are upon the Divine side of reality, and either omission gives, for the Christian mind, a reduced or incomplete thought of God. We speak in the sense of the New Testament, therefore, when we say that the new knowledge of God and His salvation reaches its climax in faith in the triune God. This is the inevitable synoptic way in which we sum up, not a speculative construction, but the actual revelation of God in history. In other words, no Trinitarian doctrine can be Christian at all which is not vitally Christian. So far from being a logical decoration, it is a brief statement of the living truth. Christianity is distinguished from all other faiths by its message that a true and perfect revelation of God has been imparted in Christ, and that the Spirit mediates to men a corresponding fellowship with the Father. And men who say they could not preach on the Trinity have confused a theoretic interpretation of the fact with the very fact itself; on second thoughts, I expect, they would not really find it impossible to preach on the great Pauline word: 'Through Him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father' (Eph. ii. 18).

Those who single out the Trinity as the differential feature of our faith, however, have in their minds often just such a theoretic dogma as I have mentioned; and in that case we cannot but demur. For many centuries philosophical theologians have held that some kind of immanent view of distinctions within the Divine Being has much to say for itself, and I greatly incline to agree with them; but that is not the point. We are discussing the novelty of the Christian *message*, and it is simply not

the fact that this message contains, though for the speculative thinker it may imply, an articulated Trinitarian dogma. A man may preach the Gospel all his life, with saving effect, yet never once set forth any such hypothesis. Two points in addition have to be considered :

(1) The use of triadic forms of thought in contemplating Godhead is in no sense peculiar to Christianity. 'It is impossible,' Westcott writes, 'to study any single system of worship throughout the world, without being struck with the peculiar persistence of the triple number in regard to Divinity.' Triads occur in Babylonian religion. There are Egyptian triads as well as triads distinctive of Greek mythology. In later Hinduism, Vishnu and Siva combine with Brahma in a kind of Trinity known popularly as Trimurti. Söderblom has argued that though for a variety of reasons it is impossible to assert a real similarity between these combinations and the Christian thought of God, a quasi-analogy might possibly be discovered in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, the three Holy or Precious Ones of Buddhism ; where Buddha stands for that which is revealed, Dharma for the medium of revelation, Sangha for the outcome in human life.[1] In all these examples the number three is undoubtedly prominent, as it is also in the Neoplatonic doctrine of three hypostases in the Divine essence, the Supreme Good, Intelligence, and the World-Soul. But they are separated at a bound from the Christian view by this fact, that they rest on an essentially lower moral conception of the Divine. It is in the name of the Christian thought of God's *character* that we take exception to the polytheism or pantheism they involve, or again to their total indifference to history. When not simply representative of natural processes personified, they spring out of philosophic theory manipulating abstract ideas. In short, they stand for a conception of God which is ethically inferior to the Christian conception, and no one

[1] See his *Vater, Sohn und Geist.*

will doubt that it is at the ethical revelation of God in Jesus that we must look steadily if we are to reach what is new and decisive in our faith.

(2) The doctrine of the Trinity is in any case an expression of Christian monotheism, not an alternative to it, or a rival. It results from the effort to reaffirm the unity of God in the light of Christ's influence and the new Spirit-filled life of believers. What counts is always the spiritual meaning of God, and no Trinitarian view that conflicted with Jesus' teaching on His Father's moral being would have the least chance with the Christian mind. At every point it is of this spiritual meaning that we have to think.

Monotheism, which is the belief that only one personal God exists and there cannot possibly be more, is admittedly found in other faiths than Christianity. In spite of the fact that 'monotheism as a form of religion was almost as incredible to the ancient world as polytheism is to us to-day,'[1] belief in the unity of God was everywhere winning the average thinking man for one or two centuries before Christ. The drift to monotheism was naturally very old. Apart altogether from the Hebrews, Varuna, an exalted deity of old Vedic religion, had looked like developing into a moral Lord of all on something like Old Testament lines, but afterwards, through subtle forces of soul and climate, fell away into a mere nature-god. It is true that the Greek dramatists, Aeschylus and Sophocles, use language of a polytheist colour and make no firm protest against the current pluralism, so that to call them convinced monotheists is barely possible; but yet, unlike Homer, they have nothing to say about conflicting wills in the celestial hierarchy, the predominance of Zeus is assured, and no doubt exists concerning the real unity of purpose which the world embodies. Thought is obviously moving, and moving in a fixed direction. The

[1] Hamilton, *Discovery and Revelation*, p. 2.

higher mind, guided by philosophers and mystics, is attaining to beliefs which in certain important respects are comparable with those of the Hebrew prophets. Plato's theism may be disputed, but at least it is clear that he believed in the unity, the rationality, and the spirituality of the Power or Being which forms the ultimately real, and gives oneness both to cosmic phenomena and to the varied elements of experience.

Thus the work of Christian apologetics had begun long before Christianity itself. The task of exposing idolatry and polytheism, and of bringing a damaging fire to bear upon the popular worships with their ceremonies and orgies and foolish stories about the gods, was started by Xenophanes. Socrates and Plato continued it—Plato, let us remember, identified God and goodness—and from the Epicureans and the Academics it received a more intellectual and systematic form. The moral nature of the gods was proclaimed by writers who never clearly grasped the unity of Godhead; while on the other hand the unity was strongly emphasised by Stoicism, which few would call theistic, yet which explained all the gods as but special forms of one Divine energy. Even at Rome the cult of Jupiter, the sky-god, showed a drift towards monotheism. Oriental cults too were in movement: *theocrasia*, or the fusion of deities, became a frequent phenomenon, as when Osiris absorbs several older gods into himself. Isis in like manner is 'one and all'; in Apuleius the words are put in the goddess's lips: 'My sole deity the whole world worships under different forms, with varied usage, with manifold names.'[1] This species of syncretism followed the track of military conquest, those who saw one monarchy on earth being apt to think there could be only one in heaven. Polytheist peoples made a strong effort to prove their own gods identical with the gods of other lands, different as the names might be. In other cases the devotee steadily claimed for his

[1] Compare the whole passage, *Met.* xi. 5.

God the supreme and all-embracing function. 'It was an age,' writes Hatch in well-known words, 'in which men were feeling after God, and not feeling in vain; from the domains of ethics, physics, metaphysics alike, from the depths of the moral consciousness, and from the cloud-lands of poets' dreams, the ideas of men were trooping in one vast host to proclaim with a united voice that there are not many gods, but only One, one First Cause by whom all things were made.' [1]

The attraction of Judaism for the ancient world obviously lay in its monotheistic conviction, its profound spiritual simplicity. The Jewish communities of the great cities and beside the commercial routes of the Empire might seem to practise merely one more of the numberless contemporary national cults. But the words, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is God alone,' which form the first sentence of the morning and evening confession of faith, though accompanied by what was often felt as an almost inhuman religious exclusiveness and austerity, had a solemn charm for simpler hearts, and gained many an enlightened pagan. God is One and there is no other.

It is not so demonstrable that paganism had caught sight of the Divine personality. The grasp even of philosophy on a truth which Christianity must regard as vital appears to have been, at most, transient and uncertain. Of course 'the gods' were personal enough; they were really too human to be divine. But the language even of the great monistic thinkers is constantly being crossed by doubt, and, for religious faith, to be doubtful of God's personal nature is virtually the equivalent of denying it. Socrates and Plato, for example, leave quite different impressions on different minds. If in the nineteenth century Walter Pater declares that 'Socrates pierces through to one unmistakable Person, of perfect intelligence, power and goodness,' on the other hand a fairly sensible contemporary like Xenophon seems

[1] *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 14.

never to have dreamt that Socrates was anything but a polytheist. So, again, Professor Burnet argues that 'Plato's God is certainly a "personal" god, as we should put it; for he is Mind (νοῦς) existing in a living soul'; and of course no instructed reader will deny the presence of theistic elements in Plato, particularly in the *Laws*. The trouble is that so often he takes an opposite line. Professor Burnet himself cautions us against supposing that Plato meant by God exactly what a modern theist would mean by the word; adding that in the Platonic system 'God is not the only self-moved mover but simply the best of them,' while 'the question of monotheism or polytheism was not an important one to the Greeks, and Plato might have admitted other gods, so long as they were strictly subordinate.' [1] This may seem to be casting back to the previous question of the Divine unity, but it is not really: the point is, there can only be one God of the personal kind believed in by Christians; and for them, the unity and personality are but distinguishable sides of the same truth. We have to choose, as far as I can see, between saying that Plato did not really think of God as personal, but (at least often) took the moral purpose of the universe or the self-moving source of good motions, and called this 'God' in a spirit of accommodation to popular feeling, and saying that when at times he appears to call God personal, such a God is for him of quite secondary importance. As it has been put, 'it is the Ideas, and not, as in so many modern systems, God, which are, for Plato, the *ens realissimum*.' [2] Even if we overlook an ambiguity in which religion can never rest, there is obviously nothing here like a full parallel to the profoundly ethical monotheism of the Hebrew prophets. This at all events is the view of some of our best Platonists.

[1] *Greek Philosophy*, p. 336. In the *Laws*, written in his old age, Plato provides that the religious organisation of his ideal State shall include a plurality of gods.

[2] A. E. Taylor, *Plato*, pp. 44 f.

In later Greek thought, adumbrations of theism grew even fainter. Aristotle, who points to an Absolute Self-consciousness devoid of feeling, is farther off than Plato from the Fatherhood revealed by Jesus. The God of Aristotle, indeed, is Himself the sole object of His thought, and the life of what we may call scholar-like seclusion more than once ascribed to Him is of curiously little interest to any moral being. It is the same when we pass to the noble edifice of morals and philosophy known as Stoicism. To the classic Stoic, 'God' just means the force and substance of the world. From the first the tradition is pantheistic: in Zeno, for example, Reason is identified with a material substance, spirit and matter being variants of one thing, and the God of Cleanthes may fairly be described as a deification of Nature. Certainly even so it is pantheism with a strangely personal tinge; and after Posidonius (the master of Cicero), more particularly in Seneca and Epictetus, there is a strong effort to be personalistic, so that moods akin to Christianity begin to find expression. But the needle shifts on the dial apparently very much at random. Usually, 'God' is pretty much the equivalent of what we should call the evolutionary process; on the other hand, to use a phrase of Mr. Warde Fowler, 'the Stoics were constantly hovering on the verge of a divine personality.' [1]

That in the first place: and in the second, we miss that deep moral passion for which even the verbal forms of polytheism very soon become intolerable. In one place Pronoia is a personal power, full of kindness; in another this 'deity of Law and Order, one divine Being, whatever his name might be,' fades in the background, and the Force manifested by the universe is distributed in a pantheon. As Carneades pointed out, Stoic theism was in no sense bigoted. It was ready to make terms with popular mythology and use polytheism as a crutch for the weak, and Posidonius was not above forming a

[1] *Roman Ideas of Deity*, p. 53.

working alliance with sun-worship. Graver still was its patronage of astrology and divination. On the main issue we find undisguised vacillation even in Seneca. 'Would you think of God,' he says impressively, 'as great and gracious and as merciful as He is majestic, as a friend and always at hand? . . . It is not temples of lofty piles of stones that should be raised to Him, it is in temples in the heart of each man that He should be consecrated.'[1] But again he writes, 'What cause constrains the gods to confer blessings on us? Their nature. It is a mistake to think they have not the will to do injury—they have not the power.'[2] Epictetus is sure there is a God, whose thought directs the universe, and whose eye we cannot escape not merely in our acts but in our thoughts and plans; elsewhere he observes that man is neither less nor worse than the gods. It seems a mere chance whether singular or plural comes uppermost, 'God' or 'gods.' These men are representative of many others who were feeling after a God in whom mind, heart, and conscience could find satisfaction,

'tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.'

But an ever-thinning veil of cloud lay upon His face. It was a greater faith which inspired the word, 'God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' We have seen enough to explain why the philosopher, for all his noble aspiration, seemed to Christian men to be fundamentally destitute of a true acquaintance with God.

Just here is a point worth noting. It was through the instrumentality not of the ancient religions but of philosophy that Greek theism reached its highest form. The belief of Socrates and Plato that the Being behind phenomena is good and ought alone to be worshipped, is a truth gained by reflection, a truth of logical and moral criticism, not properly of religious experience. And as a result, the monotheist trend in Greek thought was

[1] Quoted by Lactantius, vi. 25. [2] *Epist.* 95.

not in every sense a gain, for it meant a gradual loosening of ties between Deity and worshipper. On the whole, the importance of Hellenic monotheism as a movement does not lie in the fact that it fulfilled or crowned the old religions, for it killed them ; it lies in this, that by dint of lucid thinking it created intellectual forms into which Christianity could pour a new, richer content of its own.

No definition can ever do justice to the new sense of God inspired by Jesus, but we can hardly miss its broad fundamental meaning for Him, and, through Him, for His first disciples. God, He taught, is 'My Father and your Father.' As we might say, in a crude effort at analysis, God is the personal Spirit in whom Love, Holiness, and Power are perfect and perfectly united. How shall we state the original element in this great revelation ?

In the term 'Father,' as a descriptive symbol, there is strictly nothing new at all. The word had been often used by Greek thinkers in a generic and half-physical way to denote the supreme source of life, and so frequent had it become in later Judaism that the phrase 'Our Father who art in heaven' may possibly be Pharisaic. But it is not so much the word that matters as its content, and the permanent grounds in history also by which the truth of this content is guaranteed to faith. In religious story, 'Father' has had a score of meanings. The meaning it held for Jesus is revealed as we contemplate Him in the act of prayer. As He prays, He looks into the face of Absolute Love ; He beholds and speaks directly to One who has all great blessings to give, therefore all lesser things too—One who can bestow the Kingdom, forgive sin, and grant deliverance from grief and death. 'For the first time in history,' Professor Cairns has written, 'there appeared on earth One who absolutely trusted the Unseen, who had utter confidence also in the Absolute Power of that Absolute Love and in the liberty of that Love to help Him.' Divine Fatherhood, in this great

sense, is a new planet in the sky of faith. It is not merely that we can register a crucial advance in the reading of God's character, but—and here the novelty is plain—the newly-revealed Fatherhood is seen to be for ever correlative to, and controlled by, the filial experience of a Man. God, for the Christian mind, is the Father corresponding to Jesus as Son: we see Him reflected, without break or shadow, in the Redeemer's soul. The great thanksgiving of Matthew xi. gives final expression to Jesus' confidence that He knew God in a way till then unrealised, a way that empowered Him for His work and enabled Him to do for men all that they need to have done: 'All things have been delivered unto Me by My Father . . . no man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.' The apostles caught up the new note, and echoed it to the world, by putting the reality and precision henceforward attaching to the conception of God into the characteristic name, 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Thereby they meant at least that God is He with whom Jesus lived in perfect and unbroken mutual understanding, the Father to whom this Son, alone worthy of the name, gave utter love and trust. We may annotate this as much as we please; we may analyse the filial experience of Christ and the mode in which He mediated it to others; we may refine upon His intuition or speculate upon its psychological origins; what we cannot do is to make any addition of religious importance to the view of God He thus expressed and in the power of which He carried through His vocation. The Science of Religions, as a history, is compelled to acknowledge frankly that it contains moral and spiritual elements not elsewhere known. The view may be true or false, but even as a fancy it remains quite distinctive. For one thing, its content was in part previously unfamiliar; for another, this content rises out of, and is for all time secured by, the conscious experience of a known historic person.

Love, Holiness, and Power, themselves perfect and in perfect unity—such was our provisional analysis of the idea 'Father.' Each of these elements calls for scrutiny. It would of course be absurd to argue that the ancient world knew nothing of Divine love, of a God or gods caring for mankind and even for individuals. That goodness somehow pervades the order of things was a conviction widely spread. Plato pronounces Divine love to be the ground of creation; he in fact believed that by strictly scientific reasoning he had established the conclusion that God is good. At the other end of our period, Seneca constantly points out that the excellence of man is an index of the Divine nature. He says: 'Between good men and the gods there is a friendship founded on virtue. Friendship do I say? nay, rather an intimacy and likeness, for a good man only differs in point of time from God, whose disciple he is, and imitator, and also His real offspring.'[1] But 'love' has many senses. It covers all degrees of intensity, purity, and moral passion, and the familiarity of the term must not be allowed to mislead us into identifying things that really differ. This is specially true of Greek thought. There, Rohde has said, 'the Deity is benevolent toward men and the human race. But here we touch the limits of Greek reflection—the idea of a Divinity whose inmost being is Love, Love to man not merely to chosen persons, never dawned on the Greek mind.'[2] It is to be noticed that Plato's partial assertion was followed by Aristotle's blunt denial, 'God does not love the world, but the world loves God.'[3] The finite, to the universal unmoved Mover, is strictly an irrelevance; as it has been put, 'Aristotle's God, just because He is omniscient, knows nothing about this world of ours; for His intellectual life is to be perfect,

[1] *De Providentia*, i. [2] *Kleine Schriften*, p. 327.

[3] In like manner Spinoza teaches that man's supreme happiness is *amor intellectualis Dei*, but has no place for the idea that God returns man's love. Cf. Webb, *God and Personality*, p. 70.

and the object of His thought is therefore to be found only in the eternal Forms.'[1] And in Stoicism, under a superficial stratum of popular hortatory phrases, the Divine Love or Goodness represents not so much a personal disposition or active will as rather a physical or metaphysical principle.

In the Eastern cults touching gleams shine out and seem to presage more than they say. The gods feel pity for man, save him, and provide for his needs. Isis is patient like a mother with her children's faltering prayers; she thinks on their afflictions mercifully. Men were dreaming of the good news: there is a dawning sense of a Fatherliness above, of a sympathetic mind in the higher powers toward human troubles, a sense which in part heralded, in part produced, the capacity to take in the fuller truth.[2] Yet even so, look where we may, the movement is unfinished, the dream is sicklied over with doubt and fear and ignorance. Nowhere is the love of God apprehended in a form that abolishes fear for good and all; it is an attribute limited, precarious, and only partially moralised. That is explicable by the fact that it has never been connected with a familiar and infinitely fruitful exponent like the career and personality of Jesus. There were real data in the world to suggest a loving God, but there were also data of another kind. That God is holy love and nothing else; that love is not an accident but the essence of His nature; that this infinite love flows out upon its objects irrespectively of their moral attainment or individual privilege, with the aim of establishing an all-inclusive fellowship of free conscious persons bound up in a spiritual kingdom through mutual care—this, quite certainly, had not been credible

[1] Temple, *Mens Creatrix*, p. 49.

[2] Webb comments suggestively on the familiar contrast between 'the two types of God acknowledged by the Greeks, that of the "mystery" God, represented by Dionysus, and that of the Olympian represented by Apollo,' and sums up by saying that 'the Olympian God is too *transcendent*, the "mystery" God too *immanent*, to be precisely what is meant by a "personal" God' (*God and Personality*, pp. 77-81).

to the pagan mind till Jesus came. He gave men the courage to believe a new thing about God, and, just by being Himself, He made the new grounds for believing it permanently available for later times.

One differentiating mark of Biblical faith is the complete fusion, in the thought of God, of Love and Holiness. Both qualities are conceived in a perfectly moralised way. It is a well-known fact that in primitive religion little or no connection obtained between the holy and the righteous. Old Semitic belief and Hellenistic syncretism both exhibit the same oddly non-moral idea of holiness: God is holy, indeed, because His attitude to the world is *noli me tangere*, because real contact between Him and men is unthinkable, or because He can be approached only after certain ritual preliminaries. By degrees the Deity came to be estimated by the same ethical standards of right and wrong as were applied to men, yet even after the righteousness of God had been postulated clearly, curious lapses or casual exceptions broke the outline of the thought. Thus nothing is more typically Greek than the notion of Divine envy striking down the presumptuous or too successful man. Herodotus more than once gives this grudging jealousy on the part of the gods a place among the positive forces of history; and even the most pious writers, like Pindar, Aeschylus, Xenophon, and even Plutarch himself betray the influence of a view that must inevitably render God morally suspect, since He is represented as driving men into sin by Ate or infatuation. Plato, indeed, discards it. 'Envy,' he holds, 'cannot enter the Divine chorus.' But even on Plato's mind the great truth had not risen that God's righteousness is an essentially missionary attribute; that just because God is holy, by immutable nature, He seeks for the unholy, to find them and make them like Himself.

'A just God, and *therefore* a Saviour'—for this transfiguring thought we must go to Israel. Both the justice and the salvation it imparts to men are moral from end

to end. Hebrew prophets were alone in offering to the ancient world a God of untainted holiness who insisted on a life of moral integrity in His worshippers. In their messages, and there only, we are face to face with a God who cares more for goodness, right conduct, humility, and mercy than for anything else in the world; who speaks in the midst of those that crowd His temple: 'Wash you, make you clean . . . cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.'[1] Where is the religion with a thunder voice like Amos the herdman: 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities'?[2] This unrelenting holiness, with perfect redemption as its aim for man, is a monopoly of Bible faith. This, as has been justly said, explains why, when the rise of philosophical monotheism slew the old gods and the old worships, one religion was excepted—the religion of the Hebrews, which alone could stand up to the claims of the new moral consciousness.[3] Of the truths taken over by Christianity none was more vital than this purified thought of a holy God.

The conception of God's almighty power which dominates the Bible as a whole was, like Love and Holiness at their highest, a new thing in religious history. In reality the gods of Greece are narrowly conditioned beings. They appear as the creatures of a secret Highest Cause, a hidden Fate by which their action is often confined or frustrated. We may call them ideal kinsmen of mankind, more potent helpers in difficulties which are difficulties for them also. They exist to be used by men. Later it was held that something interior to the Divine nature limits its power otherwise than it is of course limited, for Christian thought also, by moral and intellectual necessities. As Cleanthes puts it in his splendid hymn:

[1] Isaiah i. 16-17. [2] iii. 2.
[3] See Hamilton, *Discovery and Revelation*, chap. ii.

'God's great law can neither hear nor see.' Epictetus says that the gods, just like men, are fettered simply by the character of the world. How in practical life this darkened into Fatalism, with its mournful apparatus of sorcery and magic, we shall see later. No doubt the Divine omnipotence is constantly asserted by pagan writers, some of them as little devout as Horace; but it is not, as in Scripture, a transcendent *moral* omnipotence —infinite power pervading a moral universe and operating under moral conditions. Whereas in the Old Testament, above all in Isaiah, God is the high and holy One, unsearchable in judgment and of unapproachable majesty, supreme over nature because the Maker and Sustainer of all that is. At first sight all this may not seem to go much beyond the earliest and crudest idea of Divine might as simply the irresistible force with which the god crushes opposition and condignly punishes the disobedient. But—and here we touch the distinctive note of Biblical faith—this transcendent wisdom and power are exerted for a morally self-evidencing end, for a purpose to be realised within the world and laden with untold blessings for all the generations. Power is the instrument of mercy. 'The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of His understanding. *He giveth power to the faint.*' [1] God is no longer entangled in the world, His love can relieve all finite needs. The Bible never wavers in the conviction that it takes omnipotence no less to redeem the lost than to create the world, and that, since creation itself, as has been wisely said, is 'built upon redemption lines,' the two manifestations of the Divine almightiness are, ultimately, one. Thus the supreme example of Divine omnipotence at work is supplied by the New Testament picture of the world's salvation through the Cross. God will not prevent the crucifixion, but what He does is greater, namely, use

[1] Isaiah xl. 28-29.

the human crime as the unintended means whereby to accomplish His loving plan to reach and win the sinful. Hence it is in the light of Jesus, and only there, that we can reasonably say, with a modern philosopher, that 'the omnipotence means neither the tawdry trappings of regal pomp nor the irresistible might of a physical force,' but rather 'the all-compelling power of goodness and love to enlighten the grossest darkness and to melt the hardest heart.' [1] Thus the working of the Almighty is carried on in freedom, absolute yet morally qualified. There is nothing before God, or above Him, or beyond Him—nothing with which He is obliged to make terms. Apart from this Divine absoluteness, obviously, human trust or gratitude could only be conditioned and partial.[2]

One idea there is which is usually believed to interpose a fatal gulf between Christian and pagan views of God, and in certain ways does so, but which none the less in other respects may point to a real approximation. I mean the idea of deification. Taken as it stands, this notion, or at least this practice, apparently implies that the interval between God and man may actually be crossed from the human side. It is best known to us from the apotheosis of the Emperor, not seldom in his lifetime—a custom which seems to have filtered through to Rome from the East, particularly Egypt, and at times infected even Hellenistic Jews.[3] The cult of the Emperor,

[1] Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God*, p. 411.

[2] 'The essential weakness of Stoicism lay in its Pantheism, which effectively excluded from it anything like the conception of "grace to help in time of need." In these days of the popularity of theories about "divine Immanence," it may be useful to insist that any faith which is to regenerate the world must be faith in a God who is "without" as well as "within." . . . The Christian insistence on God's omnipotence is not "meaningless." . . . Early Christians who had been brought up to stand in dread of the *κοσμοκράτορες* (and it will be remembered that St. Paul himself thought these beings too dangerous to be met with anything less than the *whole* armour of God) had a very practical reason for wishing to be assured that above the *κοσμοκράτορες* and their likes there was always *ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ*' (A. E. Taylor, *Mind*, 1911, p. 274).

[3] 'The metamorphosis of the imperial power is the triumph of the Oriental genius over the spirit of Rome and of religious over juridical conceptions' (Cumont, *Les Mystères de Mithra*, p. 90).

associated uniformly with the divinity of Rome, flourished everywhere, and might claim to rank as the dominant religion of nearer Asia. With all reserves on the distinction of god and demigod, the underlying motives of this cult are hard for us to understand. Frequently the man chosen for Divine honours had been stained deeply with crime, and it is disconcerting to hear a pure and fine spirit like Virgil address Augustus as *deus*, pray to him, and propose a temple to his name. To call this merely contemptible political adulation, however, is too simple to be just. In large measure it reveals a grateful sense of priceless blessings won for humanity on a wide scale; such blessings as peace on earth, some real goodwill among men, prosperity, new hope for hearts too long shadowed by fear and pessimism. It is impossible to doubt the intensely sincere feeling expressed by a thousand inscriptions that make the idealised reign of Augustus a sort of ethnic parallel to the Messianic hope of Israel. The meaning of it all is that great men —on the contemporary view of greatness—were the likest thing to Godhead that age was able to conceive. The apotheosis of Alexander, Ptolemy, Augustus, the bestowal on them of the epithets 'saviour-god' or 'divine benefactor,' was after all not the sad folly it seemed; on the contrary, since it rested on their having done 'good service for man,' it may well have gone to raise and purify the thought of divinity as a whole.[1] Also it pointed to a deep craving for a heaven brought closer to suffering earth. Apotheosis is proof that the gods were felt to be indifferent, remote, coldly transcendent.

In the situation of the pagan world, then, the moral effects of deification may have been, up to a point, not altogether harmful. And yet the thing clearly belongs to a different world of thought and feeling from that of

[1] Webb (*God and Personality*, p. 71), quoting Pliny's fine saying, *Deus est mortali adjuvare mortalem*, adds that the sentence means little more than that, since there was nothing more divine than a man who helps his fellows, a 'saviour of society' might be properly regarded as a God.

Scripture. Virgil's apostrophe to Caesar Augustus and the great ejaculation of Jesus, 'I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth,' are in effect morally incommensurable. Nor is this all. Apotheosis had really nothing to save it from sheer degeneracy. Cruelty was deified with as much ease as pity, and that which at first may have been aspiring or pathetic sank in servility and intrigue. The influences playing upon the custom were so largely official or political that, when higher feeling ebbed away, it became a serious barrier to progress in the people's mind. If one Emperor after another could thus be given divine honours, Godhead, in whatever degree of Godhead, of necessity ceased to appear worthy of the homage of earnest men. By degrees the positive idea of God became unimportant as compared with the correct mental attitude of the votary; henceforward, as it has been put, religion is 'really a desire to own and propitiate the earthly power on which your life and happiness depend.' One step more, and the object of worship will be the State itself. Hence, when Christianity came in contact with the official religion of the Empire, it was instantly felt on both sides that compromise was impossible. Neither Christ nor Caesar could brook a rival. As St. Paul unerringly perceived, heathenism meant on principle the worship of the creature instead of the Creator; and this fatal and arrogant mistake, when embodied in the social structure, issued by an inevitable logic in the cult of the reigning monarch.

We now turn to a question of more difficulty, as well as of much greater religious importance. Jesus lived by faith in the Father, and the same supreme faith He created in His disciples. We are bound to ask how far the conception of God which formed the basis of His life, and which He communicated to others through fellowship and teaching, is an advance on the loftiest ideas of the Old Testament. The answer is far from simple. The

prophetic thought of God—we may for the moment concentrate on this—clearly anticipates at point after point the fully Christian thought; unless it were so, we could not now preach freely from Jeremiah or Isaiah. 'What human language can express concerning the love of God for man,' it has been said, 'we find already uttered in the Old Testament.' But if this, or anything like this, be true, in what sense can Jesus' view of the Father, or the view of the Father generated in men's minds by all that Jesus was and did, be read as an original intuition? Does He in fact outgo the loftiest insight of the evangelical prophets?

It is the prophets that we rightly take for the basis of comparison, for it is scarcely possible to maintain that the interval between the Testaments added any substantial element to the older thought. It is true that we now reject as an exaggeration the view according to which the two centuries before Christ were, in all that concerns religion, a period of barren silence. 'We are now in position,' says Dr. Charles, 'to prove that these two centuries were in many respects centuries of greater spiritual progress than any two that had preceded them in Israel.' This, however, means rather that eschatology and ethics were making up leeway than that the idea of God had really gained in depth or purity. The frigid transcendence of God in later Judaism has often no doubt been unduly emphasised. He has been too invariably pictured as seated on a throne incomprehensibly distant, and we need Dr. Wicks's reminder that 'the clear doctrine of the majority of the authors, whatever their angelology, is that of a God who is in unmediated contact with His creation.'[1] And yet this contact bears chiefly on the past and the future. There is more than a tendency to what long after became known as deism; to a view of God which represents Him as a non-interfering Deity—He holds His hand, and bides

[1] *Doctrine of God, etc.*, p. 124.

His time. In a recent critical account of deism, Professor Sorley has described it as a system in which 'men stand related to one another in many ways, co-operating and competing, but each working out his own destiny; man and nature stand over against one another in help and hindrance; but God stands aloof, infinitely above all, not mingling in the strife of the beings He has made—at any rate, not until the far-off divine event when the whole world will come up for judgment. God's work is done, and things now go on much the same—or altogether the same—as they would do if there were no God. Since the creation He has rested; though it may be that, when the created world has run its course, and has to hand in its accounts, there will be a new period of divine activity.'[1] It would be quite unjust to transfer this description as it stands to the theology of later Judaism, but it does indicate one strain of its thinking, among others that were nobler. God created the world, and God will judge the world, but His presence in human life now and here is faintly felt. He does scarcely more than permit the course of events; the age or æon which unrolls beneath His gaze is an age of darkness, fate, and misery. 'God has vanished from history,' says Bousset. His simple and direct names are replaced by sonorous adjectives or such abstract nouns as 'Heaven' or 'the Height.' It will not be argued seriously that this is better than the Old Testament. Compared with 'the living God' of an old day, how remote appears the Most High whose dwelling is hailstones and flames of fire, and who communicates with the enraptured seer through angels and spirits!

Again, there is something painful in the absence of personal love too often predicated of the unseen Lord of Lords. In the first century B.C., the Apocalyptic and Apocryphal writers incline to think meanly of God's attitude to the Gentiles. Usually He is represented as

[1] *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, pp. 460-1.

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the God of Israel alone, and Ben Sira stands nearly alone in the entire literature for his noble conviction that 'God acts directly on all, as a Shepherd seeking to bring them back to Himself.'[1] In the Book of Wisdom the beautiful thought gleams out for a moment that God loves without distinction of class or character; especially in the second part of that book there are phrases like 'Thou sparest all things because they are Thine,' or 'O sovereign Lord, Thou Lover of souls.' Here for once it might seem as if Judaism had gone beyond the best prophetic faith. But the passages are curiously isolated—beams of supernal light with little reflection in contemporary hopes and dreams. Jesus Sirach does not scruple to declare roundly that 'the Most High hates sinners.' In other documents of the time God is so characterised as to be positively repulsive. What vexes a reader most is not that God's nature is not pictured as kind and merciful, for this is not forgotten; it is rather that the doctrine is constantly blurred and neutralised by assertions of His pitiless severity and harshness. Gradually there is generated the fear of a Being infinitely high and inexorably strict, a Judge whom no man can ever hope to satisfy, a Legislator the bitter demands of whose law permit to conscience neither peace nor joy. The way is being prepared only too effectively for the religious teachers of Jesus' day, with their endless commandments and prohibitions—this traditional and statutory piety which left men weary with their efforts to do justice to it, yet never getting one step nearer God, nor finding rest and liberty within.

At the best, even if this description be repelled as too severe, it cannot be held that the conception of God dominant in later Judaism marks any real *advance* on the best thoughts of an earlier day.[2] In many typical writers

[1] Wicks, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

[2] One important contribution of Philo to the thought of God's intimate presence in human life ought not however to be forgotten. He first seems to have taught clearly the presence of God in the moral consciousness of man. Conscience—which he repeatedly identifies with the

there is rather a relapse to a lower plane of belief. It is still over against the Old Testament at its best that we must set the new impression of God conveyed by Jesus.

Jesus was not the first to proclaim the love of God. That love—tender, loyal, active, holy—had long since been displayed under the purest and most subduing emblems. Vitalising faith in Jehovah's grace to Israel, as we have seen, had formed the core and secret of the older religion and had trained men to appreciate the new religion when its day arrived. At the same time, Jesus did more than reproduce the past. New elements entered into His own experience of God, and we can still read their reflection in the mind of those who were led by Him to the Father. It was not for such as He to possess His knowledge of God by hearsay, or 'as a matter of quotation.' That knowledge was original, and in part we can analyse its originality.

(1) The God and Father of Jesus Christ goes forth in search of the sinful.[1] When once we set ourselves to assimilate the ideas of Jesus, to put away convention and allow Him to build our faith upwards from the foundations, this truth is one about which He forces us to be in earnest. The heart of God is for Him the great reality. The best that had formerly been proclaimed was that God in mercy would receive all who came back to Him penitently; now, for the first time in the history of religion, it was made known that the Father unweariedly seeks the lost,

Logos—is the Divine agent in the soul, God's impact on the inner life. Professor H. A. A. Kennedy in an article (*Expositor*, March 1919), to which I owe this note, points out the remarkable affinity of Philo's conception of conscience to the idea of the 'advocate' (παράκλητος) in John xvi. 8.

[1] Jesus made this clear by His demeanour quite as much as by His teaching. His attitude to the unworthy startled men by its unheard-of character. 'The Rabbis,' writes Mr. Montefiore, 'welcomed the sinner in his repentance. But to *seek out* the sinner, and, instead of avoiding the bad companion, to choose him as your friend in order to work his moral redemption, this was, I fancy, something new in the religious history of Israel' (*The Religious Teaching of Jesus*, p. 57).

that He reckons no cost too great if only His children can be reached and won. As men stood in Jesus' presence, as they looked back on all that His coming had meant for them, they realised that the bounds of their conception of God had been enlarged. It was not merely that God willed their salvation: He took the first step; He bowed to the law which makes sacrifice the first charge on love's resources. When St. Peter attempted to give Christ advice—as no one else ventured to—urging Him to abandon His fixed intention of suffering at Jerusalem, it is related that Christ turned on him with terrible words of anger: 'Get behind me, you Satan! You are a hindrance to me. Your outlook is not God's but man's.'[1] Suffering, somehow equally divine and human, was involved in the Divine plan for human good; it was part of the price at which forgiveness comes to men. We can share this perception with the apostles; it is open to us as much as to them. We too can see that in what He undergoes in life and death Jesus is not merely pointing upward to a Divine love beyond and above Himself, a love which He does no more than announce; He is bringing it in upon our soul. We are not illegitimately making the distinctions of later theology, we are only registering the intuitions of faith before the Cross, when we say that the distinctive fact in the Gospel is a suffering Life in which the Father Himself is present to give Himself for man. Once the followers of Jesus had taken in this truth, they found their antecedent thoughts of God to be transformed. What they gained from Him deepened to the very limit those visions of saving Divine tenderness which had transiently gleamed in prophetic souls like the writer of Isaiah liii., or had struggled faintly into expression, it may be, in Hellenistic beliefs concerning a dying and rising god. The Father rescues men, and in the quest He suffers.

(2) The Fatherhood so declared is vouched for not by

[1] Matt. xvi. 23 (Moffatt).

verbal teaching merely; it is present in the tangible personality of Jesus. Suppose there to have been no more than an insignificant novelty of language in His doctrine, still He Himself, the co-efficient of His doctrine, was new. No such person as Jesus had ever lived before, and in His character and experience God was perfectly known at last. Every great man is greater than his language, and psychologists or historians whose foible it is to disparage the originality of humanity's leaders by asking dubiously how much of what they say had been said before, overlook the vital fact that epoch-making progress in the past has invariably come not by words but persons. The new truth about God became flesh in Jesus; He guaranteed the message by being Himself; mediated by all that He was and did, it seized men with fresh elemental power and passed like fire from heart to heart. For the first time the warm unforgettable realities of a man's life are the index of the Unseen. The greatest truths can never be all enshrined in words; they must wait for a life in which they are incarnate. Of this the story in the Gospels is the supreme example. 'In Christ,' says Mr. Glover, 'we reach the presence of God. God is there, and loves to have you speak with Him. No one has ever believed this very much outside the radius of Christ's person and influence. It is, when we give the words full weight, an essentially Christian faith, and it depends on our relation to Jesus Christ.' [1]

Hence to realise the new thought of God, what is chiefly required is not a grammar or lexicon—not even a Biblical Theology; it is to stand before Jesus' life, as before a great picture, and let its meaning take possession of us. A distinctive revelation of the Father is given by His life. It takes the whole story of the Gospels to tell what Fatherhood means. Old forbidding Judaistic ideas of God's holiness, with no mercy in them for guilty men, He disowned less by explicit statement than by His behaviour

[1] *The Jesus of History*, p. 116.

to outcasts. His new thought of God is manifested, half-unconsciously as it were, in His attitude to Zacchaeus, to the sinful woman, to the dying thief. Over and over again He lifted the burden from the bad conscience, took off the paralysing touch of guilt, and once for all flung wide the gate of righteousness to those who had barred and bolted it in their own face. He claimed to open the prison door to captives of despair; and by a word, a look, a touch of holy love, He opened it, so that in the power of His presence men stood up, shook off their chains, and passed out free. When He had gone, men were to be found who knew—what before had not been known—that God is exactly like Jesus; as holy, as kind, as full of redeeming power; and that at once, and before we become any better, this God is willing to be our Father. To have enabled the weary and heavy-laden to believe this is the crown which will never be taken from Jesus' head.

(3) Jesus' revelation is new in its purity, its coherence, its inward spiritual harmony. Again grant for the moment that every word of Jesus concerning God had been uttered previously; still, the omissions were new. The Pharisee, it is true, had spoken of God's grace and holiness, but he had unfortunately said other things which made grace and holiness more than doubtful. The Eternal had been occasionally represented as a deity of autocratic and capricious power, who laboured under feelings of revenge. But this means that truth is hopelessly cancelled out by untruth. Error throws it so far into the background that its power over conscience and heart fades. To give a pure thought of God—to convince men that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all—is accordingly to give a new thought. This pure thought of necessity has for its medium a pure Life. The authentically Christian view of God, from which the obscuring elements have been cleared away, is distilled through that which we know Jesus to have been.

(4) National and particularistic limits are abolished once for all. In the Old Testament, the Fatherhood of God is strictly a correlative of the chosen people, and is stretched by way of exception to cover the *gêrim* or resident aliens who had become naturalised in Israel. We must bear in mind that even the author of Psalm xxiii. would have repudiated the suggestion that the words, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,' could be rightly adopted by a Greek or Persian. Thus within Israel the love of God is clear as the sun, but scarcely God's love for man as man. For that the world must wait for Jesus. In Him every limitation is overthrown. The lost son in the Parable, who is met with kisses and a feast, is no lost Jew simply, no fallen member of the chosen people; he is the lost *man*, the Father's straying child in any time or place. Even Jesus uttered no more piercing word than 'There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth.'

Let me add very briefly that this universality and gracious nearness of Fatherhood, as conceived by Jesus, implied no lowering of the Divine transcendence or majesty pictured by Hebrew thought. Transcendence, rather, as a religious idea, now came to its own. For the kingdom established by Jesus is a new world-order; in other words, no mere condition of the soul but a higher supernatural dispensation embracing and controlling all things in earth and heaven. One has only to read the Gospels carefully to realise that so far from yielding to any Old Testament mind in His sense for the omnipotence and infinite sublimity of God, Jesus, as has been memorably said, 'deepened and intensified it to the absolute uttermost.'[1] This was not an alternative or rival to His sense of God's Fatherly love. On the contrary, it is only as the two, the love and the sublimity, are merged in a single filial apprehension that the religious worth of each stands out unmistakably and can be affirmed without reserve.

[1] Titius, *Jesus Lehre vom Reiche Gottes*, p. 104.

It is a distinctive feature of Biblical faith in God, especially in its perfected New Testament form, that, unlike the philosophical monotheism by which the old polytheisms were overthrown, it is not the offspring of any process of deliberate or speculative reflection. If we are to believe the Bible itself, this specific faith is evoked by Revelation. As Dr. A. B. Davidson has said: 'If men know God, it is because He has made Himself known to them. The idea of man reaching to a knowledge or fellowship of God through his own efforts is wholly foreign to the Old Testament. Moses and the prophets are nowhere represented as thoughtful minds reflecting on the Unseen, and forming conclusions regarding it, or ascending to elevated conceptions of Godhead. The Unseen manifests itself before them, and they know it.'[1] If it be said that this is to introduce, unfairly, the distinction of religions revealed and unrevealed, and that we had best leave Revelation wholly out of account, the answer surely is that Revelation is present wherever men have reached thoughts of God which, to whatever extent, are true and have their place in a truly religious experience. It is better to raise the level of other faiths than to depress that of Christianity. Jesus is not less the perfect Son that God has spoken to men through Moses or Gautama.

Nor, as in Eastern cults, is the Biblical faith in God derived from mystic ecstasy, drowning reason and moral consciousness in a flood of turbid emotion. Always it springs from the experience of religious men. At its highest, it has been produced out of an experience given by contact with a historic Person, in whom God is present to save and bless.

This is a crucial fact. In a deeper and more constitutive sense than any of the great religions, Christianity owes its faith in God—alike the content of that faith and its grounds—to historical revelation; and the Church still actually lives on the realities which Jesus Christ brought into the

[1] Art. 'God' in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. ii.

world's history. It is true that Buddhism was founded by a real person, as was Islam. But Islam is a descendant of Christianity; and in Buddhism, notoriously, no importance or reality whatever is attached to prophetic knowledge of the living God, or to a Divine purpose coming to fulfilment through the processes of human life. Our faith therefore has this peculiar possession, with which no other can compare—at its heart there stands a perfect Life, expressive of the Father. Whereas Eastern cults offer only the symbolism of cosmic legend, it brings forth a Man, instinct with faith and love. Thus the doubt haunting all religious life in Greece and Rome, whether Divinity at all cares for our worship or will hear our prayer, is for ever set at rest. God is a living Presence who visits and redeems His people.

As every one knows, there are grave risks and apparently prohibitive drawbacks in such a vital relationship between faith and historical events. These the Christian religion has accepted calmly. Never was there faith so plagued by problems of historic certitude, or intellectual and moral resources poured out so lavishly on the elucidation and defence of that connection of our beliefs with past events which has always been felt to be a matter of life and death. How faith can rest on fact which, like other elements of the temporal succession, like all other bygone things, can never be exhibited as necessary in thought, and which would lose its special quality of Divine wonderfulness if it could—this enigma, I suppose, Christianity has entirely, or almost entirely, to itself. These difficulties have not been allowed to obscure the vast, inimitable truth. Our faith stands alone in the claim that the Power transcendent over the universe coincides in moral being with One who lived on earth, and that if we would see into the life of things we must gaze upon a Cross.

LECTURE III

THE DIVINE SAVING ACTIVITY

CHRISTIAN faith, as we have seen, consists in the stedfast certainty that God the Father, who is Absolute Love, also has absolute power to help men, and that His infinite resources are available for all who put their trust in Him. This faith has been evoked by the spectacle of a righteous and loving Will operating in history, with a clearness and intensity which constantly increase until they reach a climax in the person of Jesus, in whom God takes our burdens upon Himself, and who, through His death and victory, has opened to all believers the life of Divine sonship. It is of first-rate importance to mark that God is not conceived as dealing solely with the individual. On the contrary, what Christ founded was a kingdom—a fellowship of God with men and accordingly of all men with each other. This feature distinguishes Bible thought sharply, for example, from the thought of India, where religion has always been merely a concern between the individual and the Divine, and does not lead the worshipper to identify himself with a purpose of God in the world.

This large and profound view of God's saving action, without which Christianity could neither be nor be conceived, plainly rests on certain great underlying conceptions. To begin with, it rests on a special thought of Creation. The absolute liberty of God to help men can have no meaning except in so far as the whole world owes to the Divine will alike its being and its continuance in being. It is of no consequence whether we state or do not state this unconditional dependence of the world, sym-

bolically, in terms of 'creation out of nothing,' a phrase whose significance is doubtful; the point is that God is not to be conceived as face to face with previously existing materials, with which He makes terms. On the contrary, He constitutes the world-system, as well as shapes its course, in perfect freedom. The theory of emanation, according to which the world proceeds from God by some inevitable nature-process, is once for all discarded. Some crucial elements in this view are distinctive of Biblical faith. Not merely is there a marked absence from Scripture of ideas like that of the primeval chaos [1] out of which world and gods rise together—cosmogony and theogony being two aspects of one fact [2]—ideas native to the old Oriental polytheisms which the Creation narratives of Genesis silently discredit. Above all we have to think of sublime convictions to which the great prophets give expression, and of the deep prophetic faith by which the historical books of the Old Testament are inspired and controlled. To take only one instance, it is impossible to read Deutero-Isaiah without realising afresh the religious importance of a true idea of Divine creative liberty, exerted not at the beginning merely but throughout all time, as well as the nobly consoling power with which, in the hands of religious genius, it can be applied to trembling human hearts. Everywhere the prophet uses the same fundamental ideas as pervade the first chapter of Genesis and make that chapter, in Gunkel's words, 'a landmark in the history of Revelation.' [3] Nowhere else than in such Bible utterances is God pictured as above the world and before it—He the free agent summoning it to be, all that lives and exists the product of His will.

This absolute thought of Divine creation had no place in the Greek mind. In earlier Greek literature the higher power merely shapes cosmic matter; the gods are not

[1] Not that the idea of chaos is not found in Genesis; it is present in P's account of creation, but it is a chaos subject, and related, to God.
[2] In Hesiod, cosmogony is actually older than theogony.
[3] *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, article 'Schöpfung.'

distinct from the world, but part of it. The offspring of blind forces, they derive from the Earth-Mother or from Chaos. As Pindar puts it concerning gods and men: 'Both from one mother have life and breath.' The birthday of a god was celebrated by festival. When we open Plato, particularly the *Timaeus*—that hymn of the universe whose writer was later believed to have plagiarised from Genesis—we still meet with the old haunting conception, found also in Aristotle, of an ἀνάγκη in things, that mechanical necessity which imports into the world of experience a contingent or casual factor, and prevents it from being a perfect embodiment of reason. Here to 'create' means only to bring order where disorder had reigned; and this, Plato teaches, can only be done partially. From God nothing comes but good, yet He is thwarted, like a plastic artist, by the inherent faults of the material He works in. He is still subject to a remnant of necessity which He cannot overcome.[1] This dualistic view of a world constituted by two independent and co-eternal principles, though not without elements of speculative suggestiveness, is not the faith of Scripture. Nowhere does the helplessness of ancient thought, even of the best Stoicism, when faced by ultimate spiritual problems, betray itself more clearly. But the Old and New Testaments build on a thought of Creation which is religious from end to end. The Almighty Maker of heaven and earth is equal to all faith's demands; His mighty purpose of grace will be fulfilled at last, for He is creator, not artificer. How cardinal this is to the piety of Jesus I need not stay to prove. It is moreover a conception that eventually enabled the Church to shake off old cosmic notions by which Hellenistic religions had been hampered from the start. The world is God's world, whatever hold evil may have got upon it; He made all things freely, and He rules in perfect love that which He has made.

[1] Cf. Jowett, Introduction to the *Timaeus*.

A second presupposition of the Christian trust in God our Saviour is a distinctive view of man. To Jesus, each man is a lost child of the Father who may be found and blessed in love and service. In one sense this is simply Old Testament truth, with every racial limitation swept away. In Greek thought, however, man is commonly regarded as a duplex being compounded of spirit and matter, who lives perpetually under the influence of demonic powers. Essentially he ranks as a denizen of earth, the flotsam of unending tides of change. Mysterious and inaccessible forces, his superiors by far in nature and might, surround and rule his life. None the less, alongside of this melancholy view, throughout the course of Greek reflection there went a sublime conviction of the true divinity of the human soul, which indeed may be called the main doctrine of Plato's religion.[1] Man is properly human just in proportion as he is divine. Possibly this conception reached Plato from Orphic and Pythagorean sources; at all events, he himself gave it poetic and religious forms of such impressiveness as to quicken in the best minds a noble dissatisfaction with the human lot. It led him to asceticism—a most un-Hellenic aberration, certainly—yet an asceticism that itself indicated emphatically the felt value of the soul. Later, Stoicism reverted to the Orphic view of a divine soul immured in body as in a dungeon.[2] Man *qua* intelligence is a member of reason's cosmos. And, since Reason is perfectly realised in 'God,' the soul is a spark of Deity. Thus Stoicism, by placing man's essence in intellect, remains faithful to the aristocratic ideals of Greek philosophy.

It is on different lines that the Christian thought of man has moved. Not intellect but moral will takes the central place; with the result that the soul, as such, however weak or ignorant or stained, is regarded as possess-

[1] See Adam, *Vitality of Platonism*, pp. 35 ff.

[2] The Stoic theory of knowledge, it must be remembered, is a thoroughgoing sensationalism.

ing an intrinsic preciousness which no distinctions of birth, talents, or education can affect.[1] The idea is finally rejected that union with God is a privilege reserved for the élite of human kind, or that such union is to be realised exclusively by way of philosophical contemplation. No one before Christ held or practised the view that not even the whole world is the equivalent of a man's soul. There is no need to labour the point. If, as we have seen, the Gospel introduces a richer and more satisfying thought of God, its thought of man, since the two ideas vary together, must reap the benefit of that all-controlling change.[2] And it does. The Christian conception of man —of his nature, his state, and his destiny—is distinctive. If in ancient thought the relation of man to the world, man set in a physical environment and derived from physical antecedents, had been in view, what the Bible gives is an original doctrine of his nature and destiny as involving relations to God. The Father revealed in Jesus stretches out His hands to man as His loved offspring, seeking to be one with him for ever, counting him worthy even of the amazing sacrifice of Christ. Everything is involved in this—the consciousness of our kinship to God, of freedom, of estrangement, of reconciliation. The value of man as man comes out as he stands in Jesus' presence. That this is a fresh idea we perceive even while reading the noblest passages of Stoic literature, where the Divine nature of the soul is constantly presented as a strong motive for virtuous living and purity of heart. 'If a man could worthily grasp this opinion,' says Epictetus, 'that we are all in a special sense the children of God, and that God is the Father both of gods and men, I imagine he would think nothing mean or vulgar about himself.' The saying is a fine one, but no exact thinker will identify it with the Christian view. It is interested chiefly in

[1] Celsus takes a radically opposed view (Origen, *adv. Cels.*, vii. 41).

[2] Webb points out that philosophical discussion of human personality was posterior in time to theological discussion.

what man *is*; it is silent on the illimitable prospect of what man may *become* through the Divine intention revealed in Christ. That new dimension Epictetus had not measured. If—which is certain—he does not mean by 'God' what the Gospel means, neither could 'man' be for him what the word signifies for Christianity.

Thus over and over again we recur to the conclusion that everything changes with a changed view of God. Let two examples suffice. First, the Christian estimate of sin, as the culmination of Old Testament intuitions, is a new thing in the ancient world. Not of course that Greeks or Orientals denied sinfulness as a fact. Doubtless the idea of sin was, as such, uncongenial to the Greeks, and original sin, had they encountered the notion, would most probably have been rejected as meaningless. At the same time, the pagan world confessed to an ever-deepening awareness of moral failure; as Hausrath puts it memorably, 'the complaint raised by Hebrew conscience in the dawn of history becomes the evening invocation of Hellenic philosophy.' Protests against vice, luxury, avarice, hypocrisy grew louder and more insistent. But not even in Virgil or Seneca is the sinfulness of sin revealed as it is revealed in Scripture. Full acknowledgment is made of guilt, frailty, incurable corruption, and actually, as in the Sixth Book of the *Aeneid*, of 'a certain fearful looking for of judgment.' But we miss the perception, apart from which the New Testament would cease to be itself, that sin is what it is because committed against Holy Love. Here, and only here, it is defined not merely by its antagonism to man's higher life, or to the best interests of society, but by defection from or opposition to the Living God. The historian of morality no less than the theologian must register the fact that human estimates of sin have been profoundly intensified by the influence of Jesus. Outside the Bible, the religious view of sin is constantly being displaced or overshadowed by the ethical: it is folly, sickness, ugliness, not properly

mistrust or rebellion against Love, and a Love of which Calvary is the measure. The difference is not superficial but radical, for at its heart there lies a different vision of God.

Similarly, to take a second instance, with the conception of individuality. The Hellenistic age exhibits an ever-increasing consciousness of personality which, as we might expect, advances hand in hand with the spread of cosmopolitanism.[1] A fuller view of the human person had been slow in emerging. Plato himself fell short, for, though he rose to the organic idea of the State as a union of men based upon the division of labour according to capacity, a union in which the citizen is a member of the whole in virtue of the special office he discharges, yet his development of this idea involved him in grave inconsistencies. 'Sharing, as he does,' says Caird, 'in the Greek view that the higher life is only for the few —for those who are capable of intellectual culture, and in proportion as they are capable of it—he is unable to conceive the lower classes, those engaged in agriculture or industrial labour, as organic members of the State; he is obliged to regard them as the instruments of a society in whose higher advantages they have no share.'[2] Aristotle repeats this idea in more prosaic terms, representing the Greek almost as a being of a different species from the barbarian, and declining to recognise the artisan or tradesman as fitted to perform the true functions of a citizen. Human society, he would say, is a hierarchy with slaves and mechanics at its base, next in ascending order those who carry on the administrative, judicial, and legislative work of the State and enjoy its privileges, and at the top philosophers given up solely to contemplation.

Progress in the direction of the sounder view that the

[1] 'The significance of the Jews and Greeks in the history of Religion is after all due to the intensity of individuality in their prophets and thinkers' (Glover, *Constructive Quarterly* for July 1918, p. 308).

[2] *Evolution of Theology*, vol. i. p. 142.

individual is man as man, and *eo ipso* universal—that individuality rests on the organic character of society in which the labourer is as much in place as statesman or sage—was in great measure the outcome of religious development. The third and second centuries before Christ were a period marked by the slow yielding of the restraints of State or national religion.[1] The individual, whose happiness or misery had perforce merged itself indistinguishably in that of the community whose unchallenged law governed him and whose service supplied his highest motive, gradually rose and stood erect. He began to ask himself how he could live the wider life of self-consciousness and humanity. Voluntary associations multiplied fast; domestic life took a new value; the position of woman was bettered; in a variety of ways people were thrown back on their own resources and gave a free rein to subjective impulse. Philosophy and in particular ethics assumed a practical complexion suited to, and coloured by, the study of the private concerns of life, and through many channels the conviction was carried abroad by Stoic, by Epicurean, by Sceptic, by Eclectic that the centre of man's living interest is at home, because the only things worth having are within. In the fifth century 'Know thyself' had been the Socratic maxim; in the first, Virgil echoes him in a sadder strain that reveals a deepening despair: *Quisque suos patimur manes*, 'we all suffer, each in his own spiritual being.'

Thus with a new intensity men began to care for their own souls. Cultivating the higher life they yearned for personal access to Deity, and the unshared experience of individual devotion. No longer, the better minds

[1] How clamant the need for advance was may be gathered from the funeral oration of Pericles, in which, as has been said, 'there is not one syllable about the gods, one word of gratitude to heaven, or a single expression of solace to the relations of the dead based on any hope of immortality. In the service of the State Pericles saw every incentive and every reward' (Moore, *Religious Thought of the Greeks*, p. 113).

held, could religion be inherited by physical descent, or enjoyed as but one form more of political privilege. Moral and spiritual ideas were lifted out of their previously national or racial setting—a man must choose his faith, and choose it as his most precious and intimate concern. All religions of the time bear this stamp of private and yet, in principle, universal interest. The mysteries were celebrated not for any given State or city, but in order to save and edify voluntary worshippers, who had selected the cult by personal decision. Priests, no longer mere officials, gave themselves to the cure of souls. Brotherhoods collected round the mystic cults were held together not by ties of blood but by a profoundly religious fellow-feeling: common experiences made the members *fratres carissimi*.[1] In these sects and societies which flourished in Greece and nearer Asia after the days of Alexander the Great, men counted just as men, and the honours of the society no less than its privileges were shared by merchants, soldiers, freedmen, and, at all events in the West, slaves. Through all ran the deep craving for a Divine voice speaking to the single heart.

Christianity came out to meet this movement, to accept its challenge, to fulfil its premonition, to complete its partial, insecure achievement. Offering a new disclosure of God, it set forth a new thought of man's primary relation to Him and free right of access to His presence. In the Gospel, the sense of individuality, realised in the brotherhood of a social redemption, rises to its highest point. 'What shall a man give in exchange for himself?' said Jesus, preaching the Kingdom. He could not reveal what man is for God without revealing simultaneously what man is by intrinsic constitution—his likeness to the Father, his illimitable worth, his infinite moral nature, his eternal destiny. It has been said truly that 'the world was not sure of the nature of personality till Christ

[1] It is rather a new point in Christianity that the heathen outsider is admitted to Church meetings: 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

appeared.'[1] He Himself was the first to exhibit a life perfectly individual—no one else could be mistaken for Jesus—yet also completely universal in human relationship and appeal, the true centre and rallying-point of history; a life combining in unrivalled unity qualities which in others seem hostile and incongruous, but in the harmony and wholeness of His being appear as fused in a single and distinctive character. Not only so: this perfect because universal and redemptive individuality is manifestly rooted in, or constituted by, fellowship with God. It is the presence of the Divine Spirit 'without measure' that renders Him the sole example of what personality, at its highest, can become. This ideally personal life, the Gospel teaches, others too may share by union with Christ, no longer as things, or links in a chain, but free men. To have within us, as the soul's proper life, that very Spirit which formed the inmost being of Jesus, is to have completeness of manhood. Hence it is in no way accidental that a worthy conception of 'personality,' as a free, growing, self-determined, and individually-toned spiritual life, is after all a plant confined to Christian soil and Christian climate. Through Jesus' influence the understanding of human experience has come to its own. It is He that, in the last resort, has inspired the morally clarified distinction of 'things' and 'persons.'

Let us now pass on to something else. We must scrutinise with care the differential features of the authentically Christian faith in Providence—in the control

[1] Simmel well remarks that in antiquity the soul went neither so far beyond itself nor so deep into itself as has later been the case owing to the synthesis, or the antithesis, of the Christian feeling for life and the modern conception of nature and history. Christianity, let us further note, was the first religion to teach (what later centuries forgot, then denied) that this full conception of personality is predicable of women equally with men. The fall of Mithraism, the Church's much most formidable rival, may in large measure be traced to the strict exclusion of women from its ceremonies (cf. Cumont, *Les Mystères de Mithra*, p. 183).

of all things, that is, by a Loving Wisdom identical in quality with the mind of Jesus Christ. Our Lord bids the disciples put care away because the Father knows all we need; St. Paul, with a deep confidence which he owed directly to Christ, declares that all things work together for good to those that love God. It has been contended that we have here only the reaffirmation of truth familiar long before. 'The new religion,' writes Farrer, 'added absolutely nothing new on the subject to the teaching we still find in Plato or Cicero . . . nothing to the sure guidance of life or to the consolations for its evils.'[1] And indeed Seneca and Epictetus speak in the most impressive terms about the supreme all-seeing providence of Deity, as well as the perfect trust in that good and wise control which befits the sage. Seneca says: 'What was for our benefit, God, who is also our Father, placed ready for our hand.'[2] And Epictetus' saying is well known: 'What else can I do, a lame old man, but sing hymns to God?' Ostensibly nothing could be more Christian; nothing in fact *is* more Christian, up to a point.

And yet the great faith we owe to Jesus Christ is a profounder and more transcendent thing.[3] Undoubtedly Stoicism and *modern* Christianity have much, very much, in common, for in our day the mechanism of the universe has been allowed to interpose itself between man and God, with a quite new inexorability. We have caged ourselves in the prison of 'the laws of Nature,' a prison with impenetrable walls; and our thoughts concerning prayer and the free intercourse of God and man have inevitably suffered. Thus we have drifted far from Jesus' view of the Father—His omnipotence, His providential ubiquity, His accessibleness, His freedom to protect and save His children, His redeeming power not over the soul's inward

[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 30, 47. [2] *Ep.* 110.

[3] The metaphysical dualism of God and Satan—what has been called the Ormuzd and Ahriman view of life—must not be carried back to Jesus.

life merely but over the concrete circumstance of the world. But the mind of Jesus and the Stoic philosophy are poles asunder. In the first place, to the Stoic thinker Providence invariably contains a hint, and more than a hint, of unseeing implacable Fate. It is, in Apuleius' phrase, a *fatalis dispositio*. The great goddess Tyche looms over the whole Hellenistic age.[1] Seneca states explicitly that physical phenomena go their way altogether without regard to Providence. In Marcus Aurelius the discrete parts of the world, *i.e.* particular events, are abandoned to the usurper Fortune. The Divine care of men is frequently delegated to angels or demons. Many held that Providence, however real, was such as to make prayer unmeaning. Maximus of Tyre is later than our period—he flourished in the second century A.D.—but his words are typical enough: 'He that prays either is worthy of the things he prays for, or he is not. If he is, he will obtain them, even though he does not pray; and if he is not, he will not obtain them, even though he prays.' Secondly, the predominating Stoic temper is that not of joyful trust in God but of sad brave resignation, coupled at times with a lofty self-righteousness, which, as occasionally in the Psalms, puts God Himself on trial. The dying sage, writes Seneca, will say to God: 'Have I transgressed Thy commandments? Have I used amiss the means Thou gavest me? Have I ever blamed Thee? Have I ever found fault with Thy government? And now dost Thou wish me to depart from Thy assembly? I depart, giving Thee all thanks that Thou hast thought me worthy to partake in Thy festival.'[2]

No one can be insensible to the dignity and pathos of such language, but neither is it the language of the specifically Christian mind. Apart from the suggestion that the dying sage is on the eve of separation from God

[1] Prof. H. A. A. Kennedy points out to me that even Philo says (*Quis Rer. Div. Haer.*, 300): 'It is a help to the weaker to suppose that Moses Εἱμαρμένην καὶ Ἀνάγκην ὡς αἰτίας τῶν γινομένων ἁπάντων εἰσάγει.'

[2] *Discourses*, iii. 5.

the difference, I think, may be put in this way, that whereas Stoicism pronounces the universe to be reasonable, but without ascribing to this reasonableness any positive content, Christianity holds with assurance that we see a decisive index of the purpose resident in all things when we look at the Love manifest in Jesus. Its faith in Providence, to put it otherwise, is simply the converse of its faith in Redemption; the two so indissolubly and organically one that, if either be amputated, the other slowly bleeds to death.[1] The same Father who saves the world at the cost of Jesus is He who omnipotently guides the world, and the single lives within the world, to a blessed end. Providence is correlative to the Cross. It is for this reason that non-Christian literature could really show no parallel to the eighth chapter of Romans.

All this has an intimate bearing on the emotional atmosphere by which religious aspirations were, before Christ, upheld and pervaded. The New Testament is the most hopeful book ever written, but contemporary pagan writing may fairly be described as dark with an ever-deepening shadow of pessimism. The first century B.C. is an exceptionally depressing age. Good men succumbed to melancholy; others regarded the world as a bad jest. Mankind seemed drifting to moral ruin. Weariness of life overtook the best minds, and the sombre conviction that the universe is fundamentally bad and must steadily grow worse became almost an article of faith. A long history lay behind this pessimism. From Plato down to Philo, and later, man is a fallen being; but, and this is the real point, the fall is conceived as so entirely identical with existence as such that the only possible escape is liberation from the body.[2] We encounter the same junction of pessimism and moral languor in the religious thought of India. Hellenistic despair

[1] To have made this clear is one of Ritschl's greatest merits.

[2] Socrates says in the *Phaedo*: 'Having got rid of the foolishness of the body, we shall be pure.'

flowed chiefly from contemporary Fatalism, which taught that pain and evil—and they form the staple of human life—come by the inscrutable appointment of blind supernal forces. We are startled to find a writer like Epictetus still paying homage to this cheerless notion of a Destiny which is not merely deaf to human cries, but forces its implacable decrees on the gods themselves. Seneca too argues that the Deity has ordained all things by unchangeable law, which He has indeed established, but to which He nevertheless bows. Looking closer, we can see that Fatalism was vitally related to Oriental astral lore ; in the vivid words of Professor Gilbert Murray, 'astrology fell upon the Hellenistic mind as a new disease falls upon some remote island people.' [1] It was believed that a man's entire destiny hung upon the star presiding over his nativity ; and national fortunes were not merely foreshadowed, but profoundly affected, by the course of meteors and comets. In a word, the pall of astrological pantheism brooded on the world. Individuals felt themselves to be only cog-wheels in the vast universal mechanism ; they bowed their heads, dizzied and appalled by conditions equally dreary and unavoidable, under cosmic agencies of undiscriminating rigour. Still craving freedom, they turned to magic, to those Egyptian spells and mystic groupings of numerals by which it was hoped to intimidate or cajole the gods, or to enlist the services of the innumerable circumambient hordes of demons. Such demons perpetually interfered with the details of life, imparted oracles, and cured disease. Even Posidonius—that amazing philosopher-wizard—peoples the atmosphere with their mazy flights.

Many higher minds, it is true, had long discarded these futilities. But new enlightenments often keep old superstition alive beside them ; and in any case, the deeply fatalistic and nobly hopeless temper of Stoicism,[2] in which

[1] *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 125.

[2] It has been said that the Stoic view of the universe is not unfairly

stronger men took refuge, may be gathered from its famous doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence. This view, which has its counterpart in the modern philosophy of Nietzsche, presents the movement of the world as circular; everything happens over and over again. Beyond each period of temporary unification, as Mr. Bevan puts it, 'the Stoic forecast the beginning of another world-process which would follow exactly the same course as the present one and end, like it, in the one Fire. And so on for ever—for the present process was one of an infinite recurrent series—an everlasting, unvarying round.'[1] As a matter of fact, the doctrine is sheerly incongruous with any philosophy which, like Stoicism, takes the world to be guided by reasonable purpose; but there the doctrine is, and its utter pessimism goes without saying. A system culminating in any such eschatology differs radically and in fundamental moral character from the great faith which asserts that Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. Eternal Recurrence is parted by the whole diameter of being from the certain hope of a perfect Kingdom of God.

These ideas of Creation, of Man, and of Providence form part of the vital framework on which the Christian view of God and the world is built up; and in various cardinal aspects, as we have seen, they overstep the highest intuitions of non-Christian thought. They are indissolubly bound up with the conviction that in Jesus Christ we confront the saving causal agency of a Holy and Loving God; and we have now to inquire how much is new and distinctive in this Christian idea of salvation as a Divine work. In what follows we shall have to take careful account of points at which the Gospel of redemption

represented by the epigram: The world is the best of all possible worlds, and everything in it is a necessary evil.' Compare the sad courage of Marcus Aurelius.

[1] *Stoics and Sceptics*, p. 51. The same notion appears in Aristotle, and as the truly original cannot occur more than once, it almost looks as if the Greek mind scarcely contained the idea of originality.

proclaimed by Christianity is richer even than the prophetic faith of the Old Testament.

Christianity is roughly definable as the religion which holds, as its fundamental tenet, that in the historic person, Jesus of Nazareth, God has been perfectly revealed as Father. For just this truth the human mind had been prepared.[1] In Hellenism, for example, the belief is not infrequent that great men are the most convincing of all signs of a Divine power operating in human affairs; an idea, it is true, only imperfectly ethicised at that stage. Pythagoras and Plato were held to be inspired. Also it is taught, by Eclecticism amongst other schools, that immediate knowledge of God may be acquired by resort to primitive religious tradition or through direct revelation. But such revelation is for the most part sought in ecstasy, in mystic escape from the life of the senses, or in the authority of holy books. Later Greek thought rather felt a yearning for revelation than professed to have found it. In truth, this desire for a direct acquaintance with God could receive no satisfying or self-accrediting answer from any other sphere than history. History is the field of reality in which we live the characteristically human life, and through it must be mediated the final and conclusive truth.

We thus recapture an idea on which I dwelt for a single moment at the close of the last lecture. No religion but that of the Bible presents, as a doctrine on which it risks everything, the belief that God is essentially active Will, a Will self-expressed in history with that moral purpose and significance which we can sum up as Holy Love. In Greece and India, as indeed everywhere outside Scripture with the partial exception of Zoroastrianism, this vast and decisive truth is obscured from the outset by the

[1] 'The very idea that an intermediary is necessary, a *mediator* between God and man, constituted for the ancient mind a real propaedeutic for Christianity' (J. Réville, *La Religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, p. 290).

initial, and fundamentally speculative, assumption that history, in the last resort, is unreal. Facts, events, and persons are at most phenomenal and fortuitous. They are the accidents or incidents of time; it is *ab initio* reckoned absurd—savouring in truth of grossness—to imagine that faith in God can in any proper sense depend on what is thus illusory and evanescent. Only a materialistic West, the East would say, could propose anything of the kind. Reality, authentic being, is eternally unchanging. Whatever really *is*, is and must be eternal; temporal facts are unreal. This estimate of what we may call the ontological status of history must date, I suppose, from inconceivably remote ages, for it presupposes a quite undeveloped view of personality, and is uniformly inspired by pantheistic and even acosmic modes of thought.[1]

Where was the corrective to be found, a corrective absolutely needful if life was to be built on moral facts, not imaginative sentiment or cosmological inductions? It was early supplied by the great Hebrew prophets. They first came forward with the message that the Living God is executing a purpose in the world—a purpose which can be truly called moral, redemptive, universal, unconquerable. History, just because it is moral to the core, is more profoundly real than anything else. Once this is understood, egoistic or mystic individualism is forbidden to the believer. Prophetic faith challenges him to take part in a world-struggle between God and evil, and religion henceforward ceases to lament a lost golden age lying remotely in the past, for in its new consciousness of the increasing purpose of the ages it now bends its eye upon a glorious future. Eschatology becomes

[1] Plato's myths are a sort of tacit confession that religious ideas, for complete or at least completely convincing truth, demand historical embodiment. The specific kind of reality which we call history has never had justice from philosophers. All the standard works on epistemology, for example, deal fully with questions like 'How do I know this table to be red or square?' but such questions as 'How do I know, what is involved in my knowing, that Julius Caesar died on the Ides of March?' are totally neglected.

an ethical thing, for trust in a good and almighty God vouches for the progress of His righteous cause. Now it is one of the most distinctive features of Christianity that it carries on, and, if possible, accentuates, this older thought of 'God in history.' Marcion's well-meant effort to cut the Gospel loose from the Old Testament, as well as modern attempts to isolate Jesus Christ from the continuous process of revelation within which He stands, result from a failure to perceive that Christianity emphatically takes sides on the question whether religion and history are inseparably linked together. It puts its whole weight on the belief that the two are indissociable. Far from being a side-issue, this is quite literally a matter of life and death. According to Biblical faith, from the prophets onward, the chief thing in religion is what God does, viz. seek unweariedly to redeem His children through historical experiences. According to Greek and Indian mysticism, on the other hand, the chief thing in religion is what man does, viz., avert his eyes from historic fact, and plunge a suppressed self in the moving, changeless impersonal Divine. That is no minor difference; it is a radical difference of type. Hence the fundamental Christian conviction, that God has been authentically revealed through the experience of a real historical person, of whose life and character a genuine record has been preserved, while certainly it points to a new fact—the fact of Jesus Christ—involves no new principle. What we now have is only the supreme instance of *revelation in the medium of concrete history*, as set forth by the prophets.

This absolutely constitutive sense of fact meets the reader of the New Testament at every point. Jesus Himself made no secret of His belief that He was engaged in inaugurating the Messianic era, that in Him God had visited and redeemed His people. 'Blessed,' He said in one of the most significant words He ever spoke, 'are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous

men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.' [1] He congratulates the disciples on living in His day. In Him something had come into the world that made His generation enviable in comparison with the past. We can imagine no more distinct assertion of the truth that reality—the supreme aspect of reality which we speak of as God's relation to man—so far from being essentially unchanging, is both susceptible of development and is actually being developed, inasmuch as history in its advance is positively adding to the significance of the data present to the religious mind. The world is a new place now that Christ has come. The apostles echo this great note. They are wonderingly aware that events have happened that make all things new, and engender a new joyful sense of emancipation. The load of self, of the world, of statutory religion has been lifted off ; they live in a spirit not of fear but sonship, not of mere aspiration but possession. The destroying powers of evil have been, in principle, quelled. Jesus, mighty to save, had not been there before, and He *is* there now. These are not simply the edifying reflections of the devout ; they are facts, for which room must be found in the most rigorously scientific History of Religions ; and it is futile to try and interpret Christianity, or compare it with other faiths, except as we take them into account.

Thus we are brought up against the crucial truth, which, I should think, every missionary who has insisted on facing these problems must have formulated to his own mind, that eventually the distinctive fact in Christianity is Christ. It is an idea to which our discussion naturally reverts at intervals, since its ramifications are many ; but I now wish to consider it more carefully, and to ask exactly how the personality of Christ gives the Christian religion a place of its own, as the highest of all theocentric faiths. Three points ought to have prominence.

[1] Matt. xiii. 16-17.

(1) The personality of Jesus Christ belongs to history, not myth. When we ask the precise reason why Christianity prevailed as a world-religion, whereas the hero-cults of antiquity have so utterly perished that to-day they have no votaries at all, the answer to a great extent lies in the circumstance that Dionysus, Herakles, Attis, and the like were purely legendary figures impossible to localise in any situation known to have been historically real, but Jesus Christ lived and died. His rivals failed to appear within the lists of time. No witnesses came forward testifying that they had associated with Serapis or Isis in life's common ways, had listened to their words, or made acquaintance with their character and found that their life answered consistently to their doctrine. Jesus, on the contrary, was presented in the personal testimony of those who had known Him. 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.' Built thus on the actual, His Gospel could outlast the storms of speculation. The soil of fact, to which its roots went down, afforded stability and growth and ever renewed vigour. It has occasionally been complained that the Jesus of the Apostles' Creed might, except for a trifling historical reference like the mention of Pontius Pilate, be quite well identified or at least co-ordinated with any of the contemporary nature-deities, say the Babylonian Tammuz. But even in the Apostles' Creed, in spite of its not over-successful attempts to identify Jesus in a fashion satisfactory to the Christian mind, the strongest emphasis is laid on history ; and in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, the first interest of every writer is beyond dispute in facts. A deep gulf therefore separates Jesus from mythic sun-gods or deities of vegetation, whose alleged experiences are but imaginative transcripts of natural processes interpreted as the fortunes or adventures of gods and goddesses who, like leaves or grass, die in winter to revive again in spring. This is to say nothing of the rude, foul, or unintelligible elements which these mythic stories may contain.

In certain ways a difference not less striking obtains between the Christian knowledge of Jesus and the Jewish anticipative pictures of Messiah. When, in prophecy or apocalypse, Jewish thought drew the outlines of the Coming One, this form, being as it was the offspring of fancy and to a considerable extent the combination of theological abstractions, could have no vivid or concrete life. Each detail was a guess. But the Synoptists, or the earlier narrators on whom they rely, drew with their eye upon the object. They give the living, tangible impression of One known and loved, admired, venerated, obeyed. The Coming One was no longer hypothetical in character; he was definitely real, for he was Jesus. Of the two terms, Messiah and Jesus, it is the second that represents the known, and that accordingly gives its value to the first, not the other way about. Whatever the influence exerted on Christology—and that it was a powerful influence cannot be questioned—by pre-existing Messianic categories, the early Christian mind was never occupied by a purely ideal form, but by a real historical person whose actuality scattered like mist the vision-like constructions of uncontrolled imagery. The force of history prevailed.

(2) The History of Religions contains no parallel to the self-consciousness of Jesus. Unless we toss the Gospels overboard, it is certain that our Lord's attitude to God, to men, and to His own significance for the world is an unprecedented attitude. What we know of Buddha or Mohammed, to take the chief examples, shows nothing in the least analogous to His sense of Divine sonship, His experience of God's love, His perfect fulfilment of vocation. Here of course we are touching upon matters which cannot ultimately be decided by purely disinterested science, since they involve personal values, and these the very highest. Hence I will only say that unquestionably Jesus seems to conceive of salvation as dependent on Himself; He seems to call men less to His teaching than to His own

person as the embodiment and guarantee of the truth He proclaims; He seems implicitly to take God's place in relation to the soul, and to make personal devoted love to Him the equivalent of faith in the redemptive sense of the word. He seems to do all these things, and I find no reason to doubt that actually He did them. But nothing in the least resembling this is characteristic of the method pursued by the great religious teachers. No other religious leader can be named who displays a tendency to identify with himself the truth proclaimed by him, or to claim that in him revelation is so focussed and concentrated as to be charged with power to save. In the case of Jesus, however, His conscious sonship is felt by Him to be the supreme reality; and in the light of it He recognised clearly the work God had laid upon Him. It was not that He knew Himself as Messiah, and from this rose to the certainty that God was His Father; the connection of the two facts is just the opposite. He is Son of Man, visible Head of the Kingdom of God, in virtue of the still deeper consciousness that He is Son of God. The roots of His vocation lie in the uniqueness of His relation to the Father. But eventually we cannot separate these two aspects. The higher in the scale of being a human character may stand, the more completely vocation and personality coincide, and in the case of Jesus the coincidence was absolute. 'It is, in fact, the *differentia* of Christianity as a religion,' writes Denney, 'that the distinction which can sometimes be drawn between a person and the cause for which he stands is in it no longer valid.'[1]

I believe that the self-consciousness of Jesus has never been taken seriously by the scientific History of Religions. That science has indeed put us under so heavy a debt that it may seem ungrateful to accuse it of misleading us; its undoubted tendency, however, has been to regard Jesus' conception of Himself as either pathological megalo-

[1] Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. ii. p. 395.

mania or the blindly adoring creation of later faith. In truth, so far as I can see, it is the most arresting reality in the whole past of human religious development, and no historical discipline electing to ignore it can, in this respect, rank as a fair interpretation of the actual events. The main productive and organising factor in religion as we know it to-day is the new and mysteriously creative power manifest in Jesus and His conscious ability to save men.

(3) In Christ there is given the personal presence of God, in redeeming power. The term 'incarnation,' which to certain minds has recently become suspect, will no doubt recover its place in due course, since it represents an idea with which the religious mind, at its highest, cannot dispense. We may use it here without concern to indicate the fact that in Jesus Christ, who lived a man's life, we confront the redemptive agency of God in a degree that transcends all we could ask or think. Nor is incarnation only a metaphor. As Canon Streeter has observed, 'if the essential, distinctive, and most fundamental quality of the Spirit we call God is love, this is a quality which can be exhibited directly and undisguisedly and without any admixture of symbolism and metaphor in a perfect human life and character.'[1] Christian faith is built upon the conviction that in Jesus' life, death, and triumph the pathway between the Father and His human children has been opened up, and opened from God's side. We claim for the Gospel, as a vital and unique element, this perfectly moralised thought of mediation through incarnate love. Jesus meets a world of sin not as the supreme prophet merely, but as One fully aware that in the relationship of God and man everything turns upon Himself.

Augustine, reviewing the nobler forms of pagan mysticism, selects this one Christian teaching of the Incarnation as that which is not found anywhere else. Just because the highest religious boon is now *given*—no

[1] *Student Movement* for May, 1917, p. 141.

longer an object of forward-reaching hope but directly experienced fact—men are sure of God in a new degree. St. Paul and St. John equally put this distinctively Christian triumphant certainty at the basis of all faith and life. 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself'; 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father'—words of this quality, this reach, had never before been heard. Jesus, it is felt, is somehow more than the Father's deputy, or His consecrated instrument and interpreter; He is Bearer and Embodiment of His one commanding purpose, in the light of which alone the whole cosmic development becomes luminous with meaning; He is medium of a love so vast, so unconquerable, that it bears our sin and puts it away by the sacrifice of itself. In sending Jesus, the Father has really come in person; when He would not spare His own Son, it was Himself He refused to spare. If anything else morally identical with this exists in the religious evolution of mankind, I can only say it has not been my fortune to encounter it. It is moreover a conviction that gives a peculiar tone to every other Christian belief; and it can be held and preached and lived by quite irrespectively of any explicit or articulated Christology. When men examine their own sense of it, they normally discover it to involve an attitude towards Jesus of faith and worship which definitely places Him on the Divine side of reality. In His career, as ever more completely He entered into the responsibilities and tragedy of our life, as He took our sin, in all its desolating weight, upon Himself, to suffer with us in our shame, we become aware that God has stooped to have a personal share in our sorest need. To this hour, just as when the New Testament was written, the Cross remains the last and most subduing revelation. It is in point of fact invariably through the Cross that believers have caught the most convincing and overmastering glimpse of the Divine nature, as Holy Love with the principle of self-sacrifice at its heart; and the

scientific History of Religions, registering the data, must find a place for this datum among the rest.

In what respect is this view of Mediation to be discriminated from others of pre-Christian origin? It must not be forgotten that mediation from above is a tolerably familiar non-Christian conception. As instances we may take the World-soul of Plato, the Heraclitean, Philonic, and Stoic Logos, the Hebrew idea of Wisdom, or the crowding hierarchies of archons and aeons in Gnosticism. But not to speak of the dualistic view of matter rendering it (except in Hebrew thought) unworthy of contact with Divinity, it is noticeable that of these cosmic intermediaries none was ever regarded as in any sense identified with a historical person. True and recognisable personality, in short, functioning ethically in common human life, was not yet acknowledged as the real medium of revelation. On the other hand, the mediating principle itself is plainly not essentially one with Supreme Godhead, but rather inferior and secondary. Thus the human craving for spiritual union with the one only God is left unsatisfied. Neither can God touch man, nor can man, in touching the Mediator, touch very God. Christianity, in short, is the one religion known to offer a Mediator who is actually 'of one essence with the Father,' because the Father's essence is love. In a sense unattempted by any other faith, it faces the *moral* issues of reconciliation.

Incarnation doubtless is an idea as old, or very nearly as old, as religion itself. That gods, moved by desires selfish or beneficent, could temporarily assume human form, was widely believed. In Scandinavian, Greek, and Indian mythology this thought frequently recurs; but it really affords no analogy to the Christian message, if for no other reason then for this, that the presupposed idea of God is so imperfectly ethical that Deity can with equal facility unite itself to either human or animal nature. In Hinduism, for example, the thought of incarna-

tion is specially associated with the god Vishnu, who during the series of his numerous *avataras* may assume the guise of fish or tortoise. If it be replied that he is completely manifested in Krishna, constituting in this form a full satisfaction and epitome of the cravings and experiences of the Hindu soul, we must yet consider that all this stands in no positive relation to historic fact. What the mythology does bear witness to is the need of a personal Redeemer operating within human life, and through it revealing God ; precisely this actuality is lacking. Krishna, as a self, is no part of the historical record, and in the vague fantastic outlines of the picture it is impossible for us to envisage any authentic character, deeply based in credible experience. To gain the world, the truth of God as He is must embody itself in a tale of morally verifiable meaning, with for hero a self-accrediting personality.

The thought, then, of Divine self-sacrifice, interpreted in purely moral terms (except as grace is not moral only, but more) ranks as a central and distinctive feature of the Christian message. Only here is forgiveness mediated to the penitent—as always when man's pardon of man is imparted nobly—through the cost of God the Forgiver. It is not, as in old religions, a sacrifice by which unfriendly Godhead is propitiated and induced to have mercy ; it is sacrifice made by God Himself in free illimitable love through the loving heart of Jesus and His filial obedience even 'unto death.' For this we search in vain elsewhere. It rests on a view of God not elsewhere found. Deity, as it has been put, is for the Greco-Roman mind 'little more than an aristocratic kind of immortal being. A Divine Being manifested in poverty and weakness is an entirely new idea.' [1]

But how if Christianity only borrowed the Oriental myth of 'the dying and rising god' ? It is surely notorious that in the first century the story of a Divine person

[1] Strachan, *Individuality of St. Paul*, p. 77.

who dies and is restored to life enjoyed wide currency, and, in a variety of forms, inspired the belief and practice of different Hellenistic mystery-religions. What is the Pauline Gospel but a variant of this romantic symbolism ? [1] This is all the more plausible that no one will deny that the apostle's mind may well have been stimulated to analyse the meaning of Christ more carefully by great ideas afloat in the contemporary religious atmosphere. But we must call in a sane criticism. To begin with, the pagan thought of a god who could die and rise again is pure polytheism ; secondly, by slurring the actual details of the myths we may easily overlook their curiously unmoral character. 'It is of supreme importance,' says Professor H. A. A. Kennedy, 'to notice that the central deities in this sphere of religion, Osiris (-Serapis), Attis, and Dionysus, are intimately connected with the growth and decay of vegetation. Isis and Cybele are each represented as mourning her beloved, just as Demeter at Eleusis mourns for her daughter, Kore, with whom at a later period Dionysus (Iacchus) was brought into close affinity.' [2] In short. the myths were nature-myths ; they had no connection with Divine self-surrender to death for man's ethical good ; and though unquestionably they gradually became refined and moralised, the process in the first century A.D. was far from being complete. Also I am bound to point out that scholars of the rank of Wernle, Moffatt, and Schweitzer openly doubt whether in the first century there so much as existed *any* mystery-religion centred upon the idea of a Redeemer-God ; *i.e.* as Schweitzer dryly defines it, 'a God who for the sake of men came into the world, died, and rose again.' Wernle observes pointedly that St. Paul would by no means have found the Cross 'foolishness' to the Greeks, and might have spared many troublesome arguments, had

[1] For an excellent brief account of Hellenistic religion, bringing out clearly its combination of dualistic and ascetic mysticism with Greek philosophy, see Morgan's *Religion and Theology of Paul*, pp. 124-41.

[2] *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions*, pp. 208 f.

the hearers considered it perfectly natural that a Divine being should rise from the grave.[1] In any case, and however this controversy may finish, it is altogether clear that no myth or cult contained anything even remotely analogous to the Cross of Jesus. To the writers of the New Testament, it must be remembered, the Cross has no significance at all except its moral significance—that is to say, except its intrinsic character as the last expression of God's righteous love, and on the other hand the last expression of Jesus' fidelity to the Father's will. Nothing in the least corresponding to this occurs in the Mysteries. They have not a word to say regarding the living and dying experiences of the Sufferer as the medium of an absolutely moral reconciliation between God and man.

Recurring now to the Old Testament, let us note that the story of Jesus, who in Divine love humbled Himself and became obedient to death, transcends in its revealing significance even the highest visions of Hebrew faith. Redemption is proclaimed in the Old Testament, and proclaimed as God's work; to this the New Testament adds the disclosure of its cost. This is really not difficult to prove. The words 'broken for you,' which occur in St. Paul's narrative of the institution of the Last Supper, strike a note unfamiliar to Jewish anticipations of the Messiah. 'The idea of the Messianic sufferings and death,' it has been said, 'is one that wakes no echo in the heart of any contemporary of our Lord, not even excepting His disciples.'[2] St. Paul, every one knows, had been compelled to modify his Messianic conceptions from end to end by the overpowering fact of the Cross. True, there was a great passage in Isaiah which spoke of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah; and here, if anywhere, the future does seem to be revealed, 'because the prophet has come so near to the moral centre of life that

[1] *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 1915, p. 44.
[2] Muirhead, *The Eschatology of Jesus*, p. 206.

he discerns the Divine ideas before they begin to work in the world.'[1] But from such humiliations the figure of the Messiah was held strictly aloof. It was only in the light of history that the daring forward step could be taken of combining the two in one. The Messiah and the Suffering Servant were now united in Christian faith because in the first instance they had been united in historic fact—in the revolutionary experience of Jesus.

Thus the Christian religion stands by itself in the ascending scale of theisms—Greek, Indian, even Hebrew—as a religion built on a *given* reconciliation between sinful man and God's holy love, a reconciliation achieved at Divine cost. This is not to entangle ourselves in theories of Atonement; I am merely insisting on the fact that Christianity, and no other faith, proclaims a transcendent and self-abnegating act of Divine love, whereby forgiveness is put within our reach, and once for all we have the assurance of its reality. It is true that reconciliation formed the goal of hope for other redemptive religions. But either the implied view of God is such that it is only in a non-natural sense we can speak of personal fellowship between Him and reconciled men, because He is not really a spiritual Self; or, even if reconciliation with the Divine Self is regarded as possible, it ranks as something to be accomplished by man, which is as different as night from day from the glorious good news of God in Christ. If we believe that God bears the load of our sin and sorrow, putting them away by the sacrifice of Himself; that He has spared Himself nothing in the effort to overcome our hostility and mistrust; that by His love in action He so touches and persuades us that we joyfully recognise ourselves as children of the one Father and brethren of all our fellows—it is to Christ, and to Him only, that we are indebted for this transfiguring certainty. Noble conceptions of the Divine sympathy, as we have seen, haunt the legends of India and Greece. But to the last they

[1] Gardner, *Evolution in Christian Doctrine*, p. 179.

are legends, and no more. Never once do they intrude into history—into the specific sphere and kind of reality, that is, in which we ourselves live—by way of accomplished saving fact. They represent no work of God achieved for us in time. And therefore they are poorer than the Gospel by just so much as dream is poorer than fact.

One point more. The career of Jesus, His followers believe, did not terminate at the Cross : it was perpetuated, in a changed and universalised form, by His resurrection from the dead. This element in the Gospel is cardinal. The first followers of Jesus took it as their vocation to be witnesses to this resurrection, and, to be exact, it was not Jesus of Nazareth, but the Risen Lord, in whom they faced and overcame the world. Here also we shall do wisely to refrain from detailed theory ; I will assume no more than that after death Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples as the Living One in such ways as to convince them alike of His identity and His triumph. It is occasionally instructive to remind ourselves that the amazing things Christianity has dared to say concerning the almighty love of God would never have been said or credited had Jesus' career ended at the grave. In that case, there would assuredly have been no talk of Christianity as 'the religion of joy,' for His triumph over the last enemy radically affects our view of God. The Resurrection, that is, may be described as an exhibition of the all-transforming supremacy of Spirit over the destroying powers of nature, which reveals Divine love as not wise and holy merely, but omnipotent. If then the Resurrection happened, it formed a crisis or transition-point in the life of humanity, as marking the inception of a great new era in the potentialities of the Divine life in the soul of man. Nor can we forget that, far from being a bare unethical prodigy, coming like a bullet from a pistol, the Resurrection is itself a morally conditioned and morally

qualified event ; it is the response of the Father to Jesus' perfect faith.

No hesitancy need be felt in claiming this as new, at once in conception and in fact. It differs by a wide remove from such nature-myths as are incorporated in the Oriental Mysteries described above—such myths, I mean, as picture the restoration to life of a dismembered Osiris or slain Adonis or mutilated Attis. Even the way in which we come to know of Jesus' triumph is different. What in the Resurrection narratives we have primarily to do with —the first fact with which we really come in contact—is the personal experience of actual men ; of disciples lately plunged in despair by their Leader's violent and hopeless fate, then, just after, filled with profound and unfading and courageous gladness, because of something that had happened to change the face of life. It was out of this state of mind that the narratives sprang, it is what they presuppose. The disciples' faith in Jesus' victory was no mere belief due to antecedent convictions about the destiny necessarily reserved for a man like Jesus ; it was generated by experiences of a revolutionary kind. Their confidence may have good grounds or bad —on such a point scientific research can give no final judgment—but at least as a spiritual phenomenon it has no parallel. This wonderful new life, which was created by faith in the risen Saviour, and without which the Gospels would never have been written or charged with the strange power of convincing testimony that resides in them, is in a class by itself ; and when in studying the Resurrection we obey the only right principle that a beginning ought to be made not from the details of the record but from the living belief out of which the record came, we realise the virtual impossibility of placing the narrative as a whole on a par with ethnic legend. History can show nothing similar to this emergence of an original and unconquerable spiritual life—the Christian society, in short —from the belief, held by a few score men and women,

that God had omnipotently vindicated His dear Son, and that the renewed and glorified presence of Jesus among them had unsealed a fount of infinite moral power. Between this and the grotesque myths associated with Adonis or Osiris, representing as they do the vernal gladness of the awakened earth, there could be no causal relationship at all. No one now believes in Osiris ; but the picture of Jesus, dying and overcoming death in the strength of holy love, is daily evoking in unnumbered hearts a new faith in God, a new certainty of pardon, a new freedom to stop sinning and to serve mankind. This upheaval of the moral depths, this liberation within human life of boundless forces of redemption, stands altogether alone. Whatever in Christianity may be borrowed, this specific experience of an ethical salvation mediated through the crucified and risen Son of the Father, is distinctive and unshared.

Two brief observations may be added. First of all, it is clear that Christianity stands and falls with the message of free Divine grace. It rises above other faiths decisively in virtue of its Gospel that no merit can earn or buy the love of God, because He loves freely and gives Himself to faith without money and without price. Salvation as God's work is grace and nothing else ; and in this context grace is to be understood not as a nature-force, vague, indefinable, or even possibly physical, which may operate upon a man irrespectively of any reaction upon it of his mind or conscience ; it is simply the Divine loving-kindness, which, as distilled through Jesus, daily touches and saves us. Elsewhere, unquestionably, there have been clear approaches to this. 'Nothing,' Mr. Montefiore has written, 'can be proved by more abundant and overwhelming evidence than that the conception of God as forgiving from free grace was a fundamental and familiar feature of the Pharisaic religion, just as it still remains so.' [1]

[1] *Synoptic Gospels*, vol. i. p. 79. But this is to be corrected by his later statement : 'The Kingdom itself, as we have seen, is not so much

Although, however, Pharisaism may ascribe salvation wholly to the forgiving love of God, it frequently also strikes an incongruously legalist note, thus neutralising the higher message. After all, the Gospel's greatness and newness is to be measured by what is not in it, as well as by what is. Pharisaism, besides, can put forward nothing comparable to Jesus and His passion as a guarantee of the Father's mind toward men, and of the lengths His love will go to reach and win the sinful.

Again, the teaching of the Shinshu sect in Japanese Buddhism concerning Amida and his Saving Vow embodies with touching impressiveness the thought that God's mercy has no limit, and that salvation depends on something more than a man's individual exertions. This is in strong contrast to the usual Buddhist teaching on the painful acquisition of merit, whereby the soul is led through toil and hardship to ultimate deliverance or extinction. Of the Amida faith Mr. Arthur Lloyd has said: 'It recognises man as a sinner, it preaches the Gospel to the poor, and it has a salvation by faith in a Saviour who has done everything for the soul.' [1] Significantly, however, Mr. Lloyd and other scholars regard it as not in the least improbable that the Amida creed may itself be Christian in origin. Further, as some believe, the salvation offered in Amida is rather from suffering than from sin. That would of course be in agreement with the normal Buddhist tradition. And once more, it cannot be forgotten that Amida in the last resort is a subjective creation of the mind, with no place in history, and in reality as far

a work as a grace. Do what he will, man never deserves it; do his duty as much as he may, man has no claim for special recognition and reward. The Kingdom, when it comes, will be far greater and more glorious than man can have merited. It is not the product of calculating justice and retribution; it is the outflow of God's free and exuberant love. I do not think,' he continues, 'that these few statements go beyond what Jesus actually says in the Synoptic Gospels, and I am also inclined to think that, though they are not without parallels in the Rabbinic literature, they nevertheless may correctly be regarded as comparatively new and original' (*The Religious Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 97-8).

[1] *Reports of World Missionary Conference* (1910), vol. iv. p. 99.

removed from concrete fact as the polytheist aeons of Gnosticism.

In the religion of India, it is well known, free Divine grace has all along been obscured and virtually obliterated by the haunting conceptions of Karma and transmigration. This profoundly serious but mechanically inexorable system of retribution, prolonging itself as it were automatically and by the sad nature of things from life to life, can only, it is held, be reversed or escaped from by the gaining of merit or of that higher knowledge which alone releases men from *Samsara*, the cycle or wheel of unreal illusion. In short, no faith except the Christianity of the New Testament has dared to repudiate merit as, from the supreme religious point of view, a pure delusion; no other has made this utter breach with the thought of supererogatory works and meritorious performances as either a guiding condition of or a restraining influence on God's dealings with the children of men. It is distinctive of the Gospel to proclaim that in religion God is the doer, and we receivers only. Merit, for a living conscience, must beget either despair or pride; yet men everywhere cling to it, and nothing but the sight of Jesus, in His character as the infinite gift of God, has availed to break its spell.

Secondly, the redemption we owe to God in Christ is destined not for single lives merely, but for the whole family of man. The Christian is what he is through the mutual giving and receiving of the brethren. It is the remark of a psychologist that 'the strictly individual human mind, with which alone the older introspective and descriptive psychology concerned itself, is an abstraction merely and has no real existence.'[1] Similarly, the Church thinker, at least in the Protestantism of to-day, greatly needs to be recalled to the fundamental truth that the Christian does not stand as an individual, but as a member of a society. This was made clear in the original Gospel;

[1] McDougall, *Social Psychology*, p. 15.

for the Kingdom of God, into which Jesus introduces all who seek Him, is a new order or spiritual dispensation wherein all are called to live the brotherly life as being all children of the one redeeming Father, indwelt by the Spirit of a new community. In contrast to paganism this is novel, since the idea of a moral religion for humanity never dawned on the ancient mind. Its golden age was in the past. The vast hope of a Divine world-kingdom derives in fact from the Hebrew prophets, whose dreams were greater dreams than any dreamt before. Yet even here we cannot open the New Testament without becoming conscious of a changed atmosphere. The Kingdom is still a Divine gift; it is for every member of the human family; we are farther off than ever from the Greek self-centredness which required to learn that the individual can reach the goal of religious blessedness only through the whole of which he is a living part. But in the New Testament, hope has become possession. In Jesus and His achievement the Kingdom, by what we may call a decisive instalment of the perfect boon, has entered on reality. It is in one vital aspect a world-wide and international society, the only society anywhere whose very life it is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins, and to communicate each to each the love of God; for in Christ is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. Can we say less than that here, in the Kingdom of God, bestowed by Divine initiative and based on Divine sacrifice, there is provided for the first time the true oneness and reconciliation of the personal and the social impulses of man? The life in self and the life beyond self have at last found their fusion in a transparent unity.

LECTURE IV

REDEMPTION AS AN EXPERIENCE

In the last lecture I sought to answer the question in precisely what respects Christianity differs from, and marks an advance upon, other religions by its Gospel of Divine saving action. The redemptive activity of God must, for every religion not purely moralistic in temper, form at once the primary interest and the foundation-stone of all live belief. But salvation is not a Divine work merely; it is a human experience, and we now turn to the related question how far the Christian experience of being saved is an original and distinctive thing in human life.

It might seem desirable at this point to enter upon a comparative study of Christianity and Buddhism—the other obvious example of a religion of redemption which has challenged the faith of mankind by a coherent and impressive view of what salvation is. In fact, however, Buddhism is an alternative to Christianity, rather than a prior stage of religious development over against which the Gospel marks an original advance. It is not that Christ gives perfectly what Gautama gave in part; in great measure He gives something wholly different. The two religions are disparate, and salvation is interpreted by them in disparate ways. To Buddhism, to put it briefly, redemption is from suffering, from the necessity of continuing to live; to Christianity, it is primarily from godlessness, from sin and its consequences. We may put the same thing from another point of view by saying that the non-theistic character of Buddhism, with

its logically consistent disregard of personal immortality, places it in a qualitatively different category, so far, from Biblical faith. Hence it will be convenient to reserve our estimate of Buddhism for a concluding lecture on the Absoluteness of Christianity, which will offer a more fitting occasion to ask how we ought to estimate the competing claims of two religions based on so widely opposed views of God and man and their relations to each other. For the present, what we are concerned with is the new elements characteristic of the Christian message in distinction from the contemporary worships of the Greco-Roman world.

In all religions the master force is the soul's hunger for God. Paganism in the first century B.C. felt a craving for redemption, in which this hunger expressed itself poignantly. A cry went from many hearts for such a liberation alike from self and from the destructive powers of fate and nature and demonic tyrannies as no cult of the political or natural type could afford. 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?' is a voice out of the very soul of the time. The worthlessness of life under prevailing conditions and restraints, the bitter contrast that may obtain between a highly developed material culture and man's chief end, came home with cruel pressure to many who had begun to learn the true infinitude of their own nature. In keen revolt from the limitations, defilement, and poverty of life, they turned for light and cleansing to new worships or to mysteries in new forms. These syncretistic faiths reveal a singular admixture of motives high and low, of soaring thought and crude superstition, of tender mysticism and coarse sensuality, of poetic symbol and sacrament side by side with most primitive science and most fanatical moral impulse. But without exception they were meant to save men. No cult had a chance of prevailing which did not offer redemption. To satisfy and retain the soul, it must give inward peace, freedom

from the weight of destiny, reconciliation with supernal powers, security against the mischances of life, the promise of a better world to come. Oriental worships, Jewish propaganda, the Christian message itself—all occupied the same ground in so far as they professed a power to rescue from the clutch of demons, the downward drift of degeneration and decay, and the all-engulfing maw of death.

In the last lecture I touched upon the growing sense of personality throughout this period. Whether as effect of this or as cause, a new hope of being saved through individual union with Deity found its way into paganism through the influx of Eastern cults. Greek and Roman gods had been useful and friendly helpers in a man's external troubles, always provided that he punctually discharged his debt of ceremonial service ; but no personal tie united worshipper and god. It was otherwise with Oriental divinities. They drew men close to them in ecstasy ; they released the springs of inward spiritual experience. Thus the way had been paved for Christ's appeal, involving His final revelation of the intrinsic value of each soul.

'Freedom from demons, forgiveness and reconciliation with God, gladness and moral strength and peace in the holy spirit—of such things the early Christians speak,' says Mr. Glover.[1] The first item we must never forget ; freedom from demons was felt as an unspeakable boon. In an age so prone as ours to deify natural law, we need the reminder that no salvation strictly confined to man's interior life could have won the adhesion of that old world. Some of the worst troubles would then have been left untouched. What vexed men was not merely guilt and moral slackness ; they also longed, perhaps still more passionately, to be redeemed from fate, from this unintelligible world, from devils and death. Possibly the salvation they prayed for was nearly as much physical

[1] *Conflict of Religions*, p. 151.

or political as spiritual. But it is a true instinct which contends that redemption covers life in the world as really as the life within. And the point is that Christianity had a message for this outward-turned aspect of experience also. A tendency to over-spiritualise has often concealed this. Professor Cairns comes closer to the truth when he describes it as one of the fundamental conceptions of Christianity that it 'views the Kingdom of God as consisting not only in inward deliverance from the power of sin, but ultimate deliverance from everything that cripples and depresses the entire life of man.'[1] Modern thought, even in Christian forms, much inclines to cut the universe in two halves, one physical, the other spiritual; and thereafter to argue that a mechanically constituted system of law rules in the first half, but not the second. This is bad philosophy, I should hold; but however that may be, it is certainly out of touch with the characteristic assumptions of the New Testament. Salvation from demons is just the crucial instance seized on by the early Christian mind of the principle—which retains all its former meaning although this or that particular instance may lose its point—that the one universe has only one Ruler, and that the believer is a free man in his Father's world. If we know that the earth is the Lord's, and He can make it ours, fear of life is once for all undermined. Mr. Glover rightly takes this 'monarchic' teaching of the Gospel as the starting-point of any adequate analysis of the new Christian experience. 'To be rid of the whole demon-world, to have left the demons behind and their "hatred of men," their astrology, their immorality and cruelty, their sacrifices, and the terror of "possession" and theolepsy and enchantment, was happiness in itself.'[2] Missionaries in China or Central Africa to-day are confronted with a precisely similar situation. Reports of the exorcism of devils from a Christian convert may excite

[1] *Reports of World Missionary Conference* (1910), vol. iv. p. 250.
[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 147.

a passing smile, but be there devils or be there none, at least deliverance from the felt obsession of their presence and power is a part of what Christ can give. It is a vital element, for all converts from the lower heathenism, of what Luther called 'the freedom of a Christian man.'

Then and now this emancipation rested at bottom on the assurance received through Jesus that the world—the world, not merely the soul—is such that it admits of living fellowship between God and man. The universe, if Christ be credible, is not a hostile environment, or a mechanically closed system ; it is the scene in which the Kingdom is taking reality to itself and will eventually triumph, so that every evil or refractory element within it is made subject to the Father's power. Jesus sets no limit to God's omnipotence, or to the legitimate expectations of trustful prayer offered by the victims of pain or frailty. In comparing Christianity with other faiths, this intensely positive tenet of redemption from the world, yet redemption in the world, must never be overlooked ; for it is vital. The Christian Gospel is not to be taken as vouching for the dualistic and ultimately self-contradictory view that the realm of spiritual life is free, but cosmic facts under rigid law. It proclaims rather that all life is one, and is all beneath the Father's rule. Redemption, far from being, as with the mystic, essentially unrelated to the course of outward happenings, whose fatal weight we have simply and sorrowfully to bear, is a life of joyous trust in a Loving Will whose absolute sovereignty governs all things with free, transcendent, unhampered power. In Harnack's phrase, the question on which everything turns is whether a God exists 'whose power to compel Nature we can move by prayer.'[1] That is a higher and more comprehensive idea, not one lower and narrower, of Christian redemption. On any other terms, the Gospel would be appreciably poorer than some rivals in offered light and power.

[1] *What is Christianity?* p. 30.

Two problems now emerge clearly. First, and by way of introduction, What is distinctive in the Christian thought of the pathway to redemption—the spiritual conditions, that is to say, on which it is obtainable? Secondly, What is distinctive in the Christian thought of redemption as an experience?

Taking first the conditions of being saved, we are confronted in the Greco-Roman world with two great rivals of the Christian method, or perhaps three. The first is Legalism. It was in contrast to the legalism of contemporary Jewish religion that Christianity first arrived at a true consciousness of itself, and learned to formulate its characteristic convictions. The opposition between the two is radical; and, significantly enough, it is into the faults of Judaism that Christianity has always tended to lapse in periods of declension. The ethical aspect of the question it will be convenient to postpone to a later point in the discussion, only noting meanwhile that the influence of Jesus replaced statutory submission to a legal code by the spiritual constraint of love. But on the religious side, with which we are now concerned, a crucial difference exists between the Judaistic conception of forgiveness as evoked by merit (much more rarely as mediated by sacrifice), and the free grace of the Father's absolution uniformly taught by Jesus. In calling to Himself all whom the Law had made weary and heavy-laden, He proclaimed a new conception of man's right relationship to God.

St. Paul broke with legalism still more explicitly. Its ideals he rejected as exterior, unspiritual, and unworthy of the God revealed through Christ. Face to face with the glorified Saviour who had suffered death, he realised that for him religion must be remodelled from end to end; that for him, and therefore for all, the road to peace with God lay not in meticulous compliance with the demands of a Law—which, owing to our sheer inability to keep it perfectly, is powerless to make us right with God and

cannot in any case remove inward corruption—but in lowly, grateful acceptance of what God has done for the sinful in the Cross. Whatever our view of Paulinism as a system, and especially of the Pauline interpretation or interpretations of Christ's death, we shall probably be agreed in holding that true religion is profoundly indebted to the man who thus brought out decisively the inner superiority of grace to law. For whether or not we charge it upon Pharisaism generally, the belief was widely spread and influential among Jesus' contemporaries that a man by correct observances can actually put God under an obligation and present a claim to have merit recognised and recompensed. The idea of reward poisoned the springs of piety, better intuitions died in its presence.

One result of this Judaistic error naturally was that it became impossible to distinguish ritual and morality as they ought to be distinguished. Like ritual, morality was felt to concern itself simply with positive enactments; it was not supreme but co-ordinate with the non-moral; it was moreover to some extent regarded as having been imposed unconditionally from without, as by a Sultan, with the inevitable consequence that salvation became restricted to the Jewish people and all who might adhere to them. The temper thus produced in the worshipper tended to oscillate between the extremes of fear and pride. St. Paul, under the influence of Jesus, swept away these legalistic barriers, proclaiming that in view of the Cross righteousness is ours as a Divine gift. Men are pardoned not for their obedience but out of pure Divine love. The Cross generates such a view of God that through it our minds open to faith in the Father. It cannot be too clearly understood that on the basis of legalism the very notion of redemption becomes irrelevant, except in the dreary sense that man is bidden or invited to redeem himself, and at the same time assured that failure is inevitable. His conscious impotence brings him to despair. True and victorious morality is only

possible through the impartation of a new spirit due to an initial assurance of God's love deeper and stronger than all our sin. Thus it is Christianity that rose up to destroy once and for all the incurable human tendency in religion to rest upon external ordinances, and be slaves of God instead of children. It declares that redemption can be obtained solely by way of the faith which casts itself contritely but confidently upon the Father's mercy, and that to be redeemed thus is to have goodness made an assured career. This characteristic is of itself sufficient to mark out Christianity as a new and universal religion. It is not of course in the same degree new over against the best intuitions of the Old Testament, but as compared with Judaism it forms a life-giving innovation.

But legalism flourished in other fields than those of Judaism. The Stoic equally with the Pharisee reared his life on a basis of legal works. The sage has, he is encouraged to have, a lofty consciousness of personal merit. His chosen motto is to fear neither gods nor men but climb the path of triumphant virtue with a proud zeal, assured of his own ability to meet all the claims of duty, however exacting. No one, writes Cicero, has ever put down his virtues to the gods' account, or given thanks to heaven for his courage.[1] In such an atmosphere St. Paul's words would have been felt as exasperatingly unintelligible: 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' Here may well be found the source of that curious imperturbable hauteur with which the Stoic looked down on the common herd tyrannised over by passion—that boundless self-esteem in which the hero of virtue declined to make himself the servant of the brethren or even let his heart be wrung by sympathy for their pain. Again, Divine forgiveness for the past is outside his view. Sin, and the treatment of sin, for the Stoic, move always within a man's own mind; it is wisdom doubtless to recognise our faults, with their loss and shortcoming,

[1] *De. Nat. Deor.*, iii. 36.

and to promise ourselves real amendment for the future; but our one substantial hope is to do better by eradicating passion, suppressing emotion, bracing the will, not in the least by grasping the higher aid of another, whose sympathy, even were it real, is inaccessible. The remission of sins is but a phrase, since each violated right is duly penalised by self-acting law; and there the story ends. Numerous attempts have been made to identify or at least assimilate Stoic sage and Christian saint; in reality, as Boissier remarks, no more absolute contrast could be imagined.[1] Whereas the men of the New Testament are, at every point, dependent on grace, and therefore free in the profoundest sense of freedom, the sage is self-sufficient and can be described by Seneca as 'living with the gods on equal terms.' In some ways, indeed, he is their superior. 'The wise man,' Seneca says, 'like Jupiter, despises the good things of earth, but with this difference that Jupiter is unable to make any use of these goods, while the wise man does not wish to. Like God, the sage fears nothing; but in God this absence of fear is the effect of His nature, while the sage attains to it by voluntary effort.' Hence the sage must not be called God's debtor; he is His ally, not His suppliant, and his first duty is self-confidence. 'What need have you of prayers?' Seneca asks a correspondent; '*fac te ipse felicem*, provide your own happiness.' When at last death arrives, the wise man will be able to look up and say: 'I render Thee back my soul better than I received it.' In particular moral precepts Stoicism and Christianity may well agree; as religions, they are poles apart.

Both forms of legalism, the Judaistic and the Stoic, Christianity transcends by its purely religious message of free Divine grace. Over against Judaism, it absorbs and deepens to the utmost limit the evangelic thought of the Old Testament, where, as in Deutero-Isaiah and the Psalms, even the righteousness of God appears as a

[1] See *La religion romaine*, vol. ii. pp. 74 ff.

missionary and redemptive attribute; it further adds new dimensions to the love of God by proclaiming that, at His own infinite cost, He seeks and finds the guilty. Over against Stoicism, it replaces a quasi-theistic but in reality semi-polytheistic moralism by the faithful and gracious fellowship of the living God. The supreme gift offered to the Stoic by the new faith was that personal friendship and communion with the Father which Jesus puts within the reach of all.

Legalism in the last resort is selfish. Its gaze is after all directed inwardly, for its interest lies, predominantly if not consciously, in subjective attainment, not in the desire to escape from self to a life in which self is forgotten in the love of that which is not self. And Jesus Christ first revealed the true pregnant significance of the human thirst for redemption, by liberating it altogether from the entanglements of egoistic impulse. He expelled self from the focus of personal concern, by making God the centre of life. There was in this no invasion of personality, no encroachment upon ethical self-determination; for through the spontaneously recognised and trusted impression of His own person He for the first time conveyed to the human spirit that abiding sense and sure apprehension of absolute values which alone, for moral beings, constitutes the experience of salvation.

The second important rival of the Christian way of redemption is Greco-Oriental mysticism, which presents salvation as a purely individual experience to be attained through ascetic practice and ecstasy. To this wide subject I can scarcely hope to do justice in what must be a few cursory remarks. When the Eastern cults swept over the Roman Empire, in successive waves, the undying attraction of asceticism for the human heart was again clearly shown. The fastings and abstinences of the Mystery-priests, their scourgings and castrations, filthy garments and tedious pilgrimages, made a deep impression on the

crowd. Nor did the votaries yield to them in zeal. Thrice in winter, writes Juvenal, the worshipper of the Magna Mater must bathe in the icy Tiber, and, shivering with cold, drag herself round the temple on bleeding knees; at the behest of the goddess the votary of Isis must travel to Egypt and from the Nile fetch holy water, to be poured out in the temple.[1] Here, as in Orphism, salvation means deliverance from the body, the soul's dungeon; only so is it possible for the spark of true Divinity to receive the higher essence which, if realistically assimilated, makes it immortal and superior to decay. In these ascetic ways—and asceticism is nothing but legalism applied to the life of feeling—man is 'deified'; instead of mortal he becomes god. Along with this went a very influential belief that redemption, at bottom, is a cosmic process. It is part of the agelong conflict with dark astral powers. During its journey from heaven, the soul had taken on the qualities of the heavenly spheres, finally entering the body; it must now retrace its steps, lay aside its earthly garb, and in pure aetherial form seek once again the regions of light. Of this reascent the Mystery-experience is a symbolic but also effective anticipation. Posidonius is a famous name in such theosophy. It rests, as we have seen, on the conviction that matter, as impure, is alien to spirit; the redeemed man, accordingly, is the man whose fortunate soul has been cleansed from corporeal pollutions and released from the incubus of a mortal frame. Not every soul is capable of the ascent. But the chosen heroes of virtue, great benefactors of mankind, statesmen of unselfish zeal and wisdom—these and such as these attain the blessed spheres.

Asceticism is one form of redemption through self-suppression; another is ecstasy, with its transient obliteration of rational and moral consciousness. In the Dionysic cult, for example, there supervenes a psychical state of wild enthusiasm in which the patient 'loses himself'

[1] *Sat. VI.*, 521-9.

utterly; in transport or mania he passes sheerly under the dominion of a higher external agency, becoming no more than a passive instrument played upon by the god. Members of the brotherhoods gathered about the Mysteries—those of Isis-Osiris, for example—had imparted to them a promise of escape from the dismal load of fate and impurity; an escape by way of a Divine ecstasy through self-identification (of the most realistic character) with god or goddess in certain dramatic adventures by means of which the deity had attained triumph over death, and thus gained power to impart a like triumph to the worshipper. The congregation was appealed to by successive scenes forming a sort of passion-play, and calculated to excite wild emotions; or they shared in sacramental meals, in which holy emblems were handled and sacred potions drunk, believing (it is said) that thereby they actually partook physically in the experience of the dying and rising god. Nothing, apparently, spoke to conscience or the faculties of rational insight. The impulse came through fear and hope, through grief and exulting joy, through every stormy emotion roused by the bizarre stage-representations, or by the magically conceived action of the sacramental elements. But whether union with Deity was thought of as 'divinisation' or 'regeneration,' in either case the experience came and went without spiritual meaning or moral content touching the mind by psychologically intelligible motive; this was so even in worships where the ritual was quieter. But we cannot turn from all this with a smile of pity. Here too religion was a passionate 'prayer for life.' For a brief hour, the possessed votary flung off the soul's chain, awoke to new superhuman powers, savoured a foretaste of immortality. But not through the nobler faculties of man, and not with enduring ethical results. The godhead here is after all alien to man's true nature; so ineffably distant, indeed, as to be accessible solely to those who leave all moral consciousness behind. The

worshipper, to reach his goal, must plunge in religious frenzy, must rise to the Divine in thrilling rapture and delirium; he is most 'god' when most completely 'out of his mind.' Nothing but transport overwhelming and uncontrollable can bridge the gulf between God and man; and this only for a fleeting moment.

Thus the pathway to redemption, as the Mysteries symbolise it, consists in the self-identification of man with a higher Divine essence, through the instrumentality of mystic theurgic rites, usually quite out of relation to conscience or rational thought or social ties. Human nature is impregnated with the Divine by means of a psychic storm, and initiated souls obtain godlike powers by eating a meal in which the god is present physically, or by a bath of blood. As we have seen, the religious promise with which this entire system of ideas is laden must not be underestimated. It disclosed a genuine craving for Divine life. Nor can we doubt that the idea of salvation, and of the means by which salvation can be secured, was imperceptibly being purified. The change from grace conceived as intoxication to grace conceived as inspiring ecstasy was all to the good. Plato's use of Orphism proved its capacity of spiritual meaning. And it must not be forgotten that cultivated worshippers may well have read the gross elements of ritual, up to a point, as but the material symbols of a higher truth. Certainly the hope of a blessed, triumphant immortality was not ignoble, and the central idea of 'regeneration,' though so realistically presented, did express a profound consciousness of creaturely, and even of moral, imperfection. Some elevating influence on the worshipper there must have been. 'In the mysteries,' Cicero observes, 'we perceive the real principles of life, and learn not only to live happily but to die with fairer hope.' [1] True passion for the fuller life, true faith and experience, were somehow mediated through even the more barbaric cults, and

[1] *De Leg.*, iii. 14.

these, as we have seen, were subject to an unceasing process of refinement. Peace and assurance were everywhere sought, not wholly in vain. Always the impulse of self-transcendence, or of self-surrender to an infinite object, led men to feel for the hem of God's garment, even if a veil still concealed His face.

At the same time it would be misleading to suggest that by the beginning of the Christian era this process of refinement and moralisation was in any real sense complete. Asceticism, the mortifying and eradication of living impulse, could yield only a spurious morality. Neither ecstasy nor the longing to apprehend Deity in sensible or substantial forms, the higher essence being assimilated in modes really physical, can be accepted as a legitimate alternative to faith as Jesus taught it. Bousset, who speaks with knowledge, declares roundly that the piety of the Mystery cults was wholly individualistic, eudaemonistic and egoistic, and that there was a constant tendency to obliterate the boundary-line between God and man.[1] Rohde not less emphatically says that no moral effect whatever was left on the worshipper.[2] This has an extreme sound; but at least it is undeniable that in the Mysteries redemption has only the faintest connection with ethical motive and none at all with historical fact, and that from beginning to end ritual tyrannises over conscience. Salvation is in the main a nature-process, in which spontaneous faith and moral conviction have little or no place.[3]

Judaism, on the other hand, appears never to have

[1] *Kyrios Christos*, pp. 148-56. He modifies this severe judgment in *Jesus der Herr*, p. 85.

[2] *Kleine Schriften*, pp. 332 ff.

[3] 'For mysticism morality is essentially purgative: a process by which the soul is cleansed from the desires to which the world and the flesh give rise, and fitted to enter the region that lies beyond good and evil. The moral life is therefore for it only a preparatory stage which must be passed before we reach the higher levels; and once traversed it is left behind. All ethic is *Interimsethik*, a means to an experience which is higher than the moral and able to dispense with it. The soul thereafter becomes absorbed in the divine and eternal; and being lifted out of the storm and stress of

been touched or tempted by magic sacramentalism. In the synagogue especially, it stood for worship in spirit and in truth. Ecstasy is a more familiar phenomenon, and many Rabbis were credited with visionary experiences; but, as has been said, 'such experiences are never conceived in the realistic fashion current, for example, in the contemporary Mystery-religions. We are not confronted in Judaistic thought with the notion of absorption in the Deity. Nor does there ever, apparently, occur the conception of the deification of mortals through mystic communion with God.' [1] Further, Judaism was no more in bondage to ascetic scruple than the Christianity of Jesus or St. Paul.

When we open the New Testament, we encounter a religion that clearly lives and moves on a higher level than ecstasy and realism. To the Gentile mind, 'mystery' was a complex of ritual action held to be capable, *per opus operatum*, of effecting spiritual changes; to St. Paul, 'mystery' is the gracious purpose of the Father, previously hidden but now at last unveiled in Jesus Christ. The emotions stirred by the Gospel are emotions controlled and solemnised by conscience. It is not that Christianity rejects enthusiasm; so far from that, it summons men everywhere to a life that is life indeed, thrilling with the impulse of power and joy. 'Be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit'; 'Rejoice evermore, and again, I say, rejoice.' In Jesus' own heart the fire burned strong and deep. Prudential religion was unknown to One who felt each human soul to be worth more than the whole world. But His enthusiasm flows from faith; it is generated by His unique knowledge of the Father and consists fundamentally in a great zeal for God and righteousness. The Sermon on the Mount,

circumstance leaves these things to their own insignificance. They are deceptions, or at least of little account, and unfitted to be the vehicles of eternal value. The world of ordinary life is negated rather than moralised' Sorley, *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, p. 181).

[1] Kennedy, *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions*, p. 50.

the Parables, and the prophecies of Judgment are sufficient proof of this. And when we turn to the beliefs concerning redemption which the influence of Jesus engendered in the minds of His followers, and their universal practice of referring redemption to the Cross as its ground and medium, we cannot avoid an acutely marked feeling of transition and of difference in tone and accent between the picture of redemption through the sacrifice of a Divine victim in the Mysteries, and the representation of the Gospels. What appeals in the one case is realistic drama, in the other the Cross as a moral experience. As it has been put, 'in the mysteries part of the sombre attraction, part of the emotional shock, part of the guarantee of spiritual benefit, would seem to lie in the crude horror of the myths on which they were founded. The would-be initiate pondered in meditation, saw in dramatic spectacle, or faintly repeated in physical wounds the tearing of Osiris limb from limb, the hacking of Dionysos to pieces, the mutilation of Attis. But there is no pandering to the blood-lust in Mark's story, no emphasis of the horror of it all. It is throughout the moral tragedy, the spiritual pathos which he forces upon the reader. Here he found and sought to display the power that should transform the moral practice of mankind.' [1]

I can only allude briefly to a third conception of the way to redemption which prevailed in pre-Christian times, viz. Intellectualism. It so much pervaded, and was so much pervaded by, the ideas and motives of Legalism, Asceticism, and Mysticism, as to be in many aspects indistinguishable from these. Intellectualism means the doctrine that salvation depends on gnosis, or esoteric spiritual knowledge. Speculative or theological insight is made the chief factor of religious life. Important elements in this view go back to Plato, and it must always be remembered that in Greece

[1] H. G. Wood, in *Parting of the Roads*, p. 155.

philosophy includes most of what we should now call religion. In Neoplatonism, and above all Gnosticism, this tendency to explain redemption by the possession of esoteric truth came to a head; for in these movements the saved man is the man who has been instructed in difficult efficacious doctrines about cosmology and the mysteries of the unseen; all this in an atmosphere so rarefied that nothing can live there but pure knowledge. This belief in the sheer religious efficacy of thought, of logical or metaphysical insight, of revelations given not to babes but to the wise and prudent, is as characteristic of India as of Greece. And in both, naturally, it is accompanied by a defective view of sin. If knowledge be the secret of redemption, sin, in so far as we need to be redeemed from it, is only defective insight. Only let darkened reason be flooded with light, and all is well. I do not know that this position has ever been overthrown by dint of speculative reasoning, but probably all who are not strangers to genuine religious experience of the best moral type will agree that advocates of Intellectualism have something to learn from the apostle's passionate avowal: 'The good that I will, that I do not, and the evil that I will not, that I do.' Wherever ontology takes precedence of ethics—not necessarily in order of thought, but in felt spiritual importance—as in every type of Gnosticism, the temper of religion unavoidably becomes more or less aristocratic, and theism fades, or tends to fade, into belief in a rational Ideal. Meanwhile the devout life sinks, as often as not, in a habit of pessimistic contemplation. No doubt Intellectualism can claim the merit of partial inwardness, and, in comparison with mystic ecstasy, may even be called spiritual; but its neglect of the kind of truth with which alone religion in its highest form is concerned—truth apprehensible exclusively by those who seek to do God's will—must always undermine its pretensions fatally. In our examination of Christian faith we shall find that while the

believing apprehension of God arises as an intelligent response to revelation, and conviction is a living part of true worship, yet the revelation has come forth in a moral Personality, not in the sham mysteries of Gnosticism, and is grasped by simple trust, not by the trained faculty of dialectic.

The Christian Gospel, it has been shown, is distinctive among the religions of the world because it opens up a pathway to redemption which is ethical from end to end. What it proclaims is not a religious moralism, but a thoroughly and explicitly moral religion. By this is meant a redemption which is mediated and conditioned at every point by ethical and psychological motives, a redemption the experience of which educates the conscience to which it makes appeal and whose free and spontaneous assent it has gained, a redemption which so far from invading or crushing personality brings to it the fullest life. We have now to observe that in order to exhibit this completely moral character a Gospel of redemption is called upon to discharge two tasks: first, it must deal adequately with Sin and evoke true penitence; secondly, it must proffer the supreme religious good, Union with God, and proffer it in such a form as will evoke free and conscious faith. In its power to do these things Christianity marks a new departure. The experience of the redeemed man is, over against non-Christian life, an original and creative thing.

In antiquity there existed a real consciousness of moral evil, even amongst those who tended to explain it, and partly to explain it away, as only one aspect of the general suffering of the world. Stoicism took the step of demanding a radical change of heart. 'If thou wilt be good,' Epictetus counsels, 'first believe that thou art bad.' This was a noteworthy advance. Aristotle had had nothing to say about repentance, and the earlier Stoics themselves stood too much on their dignity to have taste or leisure

for contrition. Anything, indeed, that the pagan world knew about repentance, it had learnt from the Jews.[1] Sin, in the Bible, is not so much a want of conformity to the law of God as a defection from Himself; it is a definite personal attitude and character. Hence, whereas to the Greek mind penitence covers isolated acts of shame or folly, in the Old and New Testaments it is observable that saints repent not merely for their acts but more, and more poignantly, for themselves. In particular, the Christian emphasis on guilt, though it deepened to the utmost a feeling not previously altogether absent, gained a new solemnity and power from the new fact of the passion of Christ, in which are revealed at once the last depths of moral evil and the unsearchable love of God. God seen in the Cross evokes a penitence more profound, more cleansing, more fertile in moral impulse and inspiration than any that could have been generated by lesser disclosures of the Father, against whom all sin is done. For the quality of penitence is fixed by its inward motive, and of all motives to penitence the greatest is the Cross. As a simple fact in the history of religious morality, this is undeniable. Man's sense of unworthiness has been steadily intensified throughout the centuries by the ever-increasing influence of Jesus, and though at the present day repentance often takes social rather than purely personal forms, it is probably true to say that never in the history of the world were great bodies of men so conscious of their corporate moral failure as they now are. But, to recur to personal penitence, we owe to Christ and His passion a new awareness of the exceeding

[1] 'It is in thinking of God in connection with evil that it is most difficult for men to see life steadily and see it whole. The Greek, who at one period came nearest to this achievement, just missed the vision of Love as the Supreme Power, and therefore missed the consequent sense of personal obligation to the Divine will, which alone can justify for the rational mind the idea of sin. The early Hebrew, with the more limited notion of a tribal God of uncertain justice, still conceived of God as showing a personal devotion to His nation, and acknowledged a consequent obligation the breach of which was sin' (*Concerning Prayer*, p. 139).

sinfulness of sin. He who has reacted penitently on suffering Divine love, on the sin-bearing mind present in Jesus, is done for ever with the Greek prejudice that what men most require to be saved from is decay and death, as well as with Rabbinic beliefs that repentance, as a species of good works, ranks as a make-weight in setting man right with God.

The Gospel, however, creates penitence not *in vacuo* but by exhibiting God in a certain character, and by offering His fellowship in that character to Faith, freely and in perpetuity. Christianity is above all the religion of completely moralised Faith, and nothing in St. Paul is greater than the power with which he led the Church to a clear self-consciousness on this subject.[1] There is the less need to labour this point that by implication I have been speaking of it all the time. The redeemed man may be shortly described as the man who in adoring and trustful self-abandonment responds to the impression of Jesus, finding and taking in Him the gracious love of God; to this fundamental truth we have swung round over and over again. It is the core of the Gospel: everything distinctive of our religion, everything in it that will never be surpassed, is there *in nuce*. Faith as a human attitude to the Divine did not of course begin to exist in the first century, but this thoroughly ethicised sort of faith did then begin. Nowhere else can it be said unconditionally that *the object of faith is also its sufficient cause*. The New Testament, it is true, represents even Abraham as believing what he knew of God with a faith that saves, and argues that the Christian Gospel, so far from subverting the religious order under which Abraham lived, rather illustrates, extends, and confirms it. But

[1] In his recent work, *The Pauline Idea of Faith*, Dr. W. H. P. Hatch has shown that in St. Paul, who carries on the original Hebrew tradition, faith intrinsically has its being in the sphere of psychology and ethics, not in mystery or magic. This has no real counterpart elsewhere. The religious attitude native to classical paganism is at most one of reverence, expressed in stated rites and ceremonies. Also faith, as the New Testament exhibits it, rises clear of Greek intellectualism.

the point to be observed is that it does extend and deepen even Old Testament faith at its best, and effects this by presenting in Jesus such a view of God as generates and satisfies the trust of a living conscience. To believe on God in Christ is a man's first act of complete moral liberty. Here, and only here, the object which faith apprehends contains all the sufficient grounds of faith within itself. Let a creed be set forth as the object to which our trust is to be fastened, and at once personality is invaded and moral being encroached upon ; for no creed can possibly be self-attesting, as Christ plainly is. He needs no certificate from Church or theological authority, but evokes confidence simply by being all that He is. And here alone, I repeat, the message of redemption is an ethically transparent thing and the experience of receiving it an act of unfettered moral autonomy.[1]

The closest ethnic analogy to faith so interpreted is, probably, the remarkable Hindu idea of *bhakti*, one of the most significant and impressive ideas in all religion. *Bhakti*, or loving devotion to the Divine essence, has been well described as 'a heartfelt trust and love towards the Supreme Being, a trust which cuts through the web of *Karma*, and delivers him who practises it from its strangling folds.' A powerful emphasis is laid on the sincerity and inwardness of the votary's self-surrender to an infinite object. Few will be disposed to question the real affinity of this with Christian faith. All must concede that it represents a genuine attempt to break with ceremonialism and to worship in spirit and in truth. Yet difference is at least as plain as likeness. There is only time to note the quite crucial point that, owing to Indian neglect of or indifference to the historical reality

[1] An important preparation for Christian faith may be seen in the personal adhesion and confession with which men and women entered the synagogue as proselytes, or became adepts of the Mysteries. But only moral confusion would result from the ease with which the individual could join a new cult without leaving the old, could at the same time be a worshipper of the Magna Mater and of Isis.

of the object of trust, *bhakti* implies that the soul for the most part feeds upon its own highest thought. Unlike the Christian who looks to Jesus, recognisably present in the history of the past with a power of personal influence that still persists, the *bhakti* worshipper is without such a concrete object of adoring confidence as can perpetually purify and elevate the feeling it has stirred.

Let us now turn from the study of the pathway to Redemption, which deserves a much more detailed examination than we have been able to afford, to the central problem of Redemption as an experience; in so far, that is to say, as any spiritual experience can be viewed in abstraction from its antecedents. Penitence and faith, indeed, are to be regarded much less as chronologically anterior conditions of the new life than as its vital functions. None the less, we may distinguish, even if we cannot separate, between faith itself and those blessings the enjoyment of which it mediates and secures.

To begin with, it is a vital element in the greatness of Christianity that it places the supreme religious boon —Union with God—in the present life. Not that it stands alone in this offer of a present blessedness. That in some degree Plato had promised, and one of the best things in the higher Hinduism is the teaching that union with Deity is not postponed to a future state but may be reached here and now. But what is of crucial importance is the presentation of the God we are united to; and here, still to exemplify the point from Hinduism, there is a wide chasm between the Father of Jesus Christ who in Him is our Father also, and the Hindu thought of what is really a distant and unfeatured Absolute. Allowing for this, we cannot make too much of Jesus' teaching that in His own person the perfected Kingdom of God had gained a foothold in the world, and was for the first time within the grasp of faith. In spite of eschatology, His Gospel does not essentially consist in any presenta-

tion of the future; it is a revelation of the Father. He brings men in touch with God as real, near, and sure to faith in His pardoning love and His illimitable power to transform life and abolish tragedy. St. Paul too, notwithstanding his eschatological outlook, rests finally in the certainty of perfect religious blessings once for all mediated now and here through Christ, and lending glory to the actual life of the believer. The fruits of the Spirit or of Christ's indwelling—for experimentally the two are one and the same thing—enrich men now. Similarly in the Fourth Gospel, the experienced actuality of salvation is an idea to which the discourses are perpetually recurring. To have faith in the Son is to have eternal life. 'No one,' says Christ, 'who lives and believes in Me shall ever die.'

Thus amid the pessimism of a decadent age the Gospel proclaimed far more than the prospect of a better world; it offered present fellowship with the Father who is Lord equally of life and death. That was to mount higher than the highest contemporary paganism, higher even than Judaism at its best. 'All religions of the time,' von Dobschütz has said, 'were religions of hope. Stress was laid on the future; the present time was but for preparation. So in the mystery-cults of Hellenism, whose highest aim is to offer guarantees for other-worldly happiness; so too in Judaism, whose legacy has but the aim of furnishing the happy life in the kingdom of the future.'[1] The Christian religion has hopes of its own, outstripping all the rest, but first and foremost it is a religion of faith. With a longing for heaven that did not even yield to Jewish apocalyptic itself, it combined the certainty of having entered already on the promised heritage, of being *now* in communion with the Father. For after all Jesus had been here; He had been recognised and understood. Christians knew that He had made

[1] *Transactions of the Third Congress of the History of Religions*, vol. ii. p. 320.

the great beginning, inaugurated His reign, and destroyed in principle the power of death and demons. 'It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom'—that word, never to be recalled, implicitly contains the whole. Hence that triumphant sense of possession, of immediately realised Divine life, which animates the joy of the New Testament and makes it the most obviously exultant book that has ever been written.

Students of first-century literature need not be told that this distinctively Christian gladness, or glad fearlessness, which breaks across life like a flushing dawn, was a strange new thing. Such joy unspeakable and full of glory is not found in other faiths. Jesus somehow was able to give men the courage to believe themselves redeemed; and this effect He produced not merely by speaking to them about the Father, but by revealing in His own life the security and gladness which flow from trustful obedience to the Father's love. And as Matthew Arnold said, 'it is the gladness of Christianity which has made its fortune, and not its sorrow.'[1] Alone of the religions of the world it has dared to say, 'Rejoice evermore.' This is a fact so distinctive that some thinkers have actually defined the method of Christianity as 'salvation by joy'; and whether we accept the definition or reserve it as but the exaggeration of valuable truth, at all events the joy in God generated by the fact of Christ was a new phenomenon in religious history, and one charged with boundless significance for the creation of living and victorious morality. This is all the more true that sorrow is not interpreted as necessarily and only evil, but may impart a yet deeper blessedness to joy itself.

If, now, we try to reduce the Christian experience not so much to its lowest terms as to its simplest expression, we may describe it, I think, as the perfected Divine sonship of forgiven men. Jesus inaugurated for the world a new, final order of Sonship. At this point it is unnecessary

[1] *Essays in Criticism* (First Series), p. 6.

to raise the question whether the personal Sonship of Jesus is different from all others in 'degree' or 'kind.' These terms may not be the most appropriate or helpful. 'Degree' says too little, and 'kind' goes dangerously near obscuring the fact that in the Gospel we are called to share Jesus' filial life. But in any case His Sonship was unique in quality. He, the Righteous One, untouched by stain, imparted to the sinful a new relationship to God which in His own experience was original and constitutive; yet the relationship to which He brings men is somehow identical with His, for the same term, 'Son,' is employed to cover His experience and ours.

Earlier approximations to the Christian thought of sonship are tolerably faint, at least in paganism. Not much can be extracted from the antique conception of gods as ancestors of tribe or family, the members of which in consequence enjoy exceptional privileges of dependence and protection. But in Egypt, Babylon, and especially in Israel, a growing individualism produced, or coincided with, a sense that each man is God's child; or to put it otherwise, the natural aspect of the idea made way by degrees for the voluntary and spiritual aspect. The Divine sonship of man is an idea familiar also to the later Stoics, who broke with the limits of nationalistic feeling; but even here it is a natural sonship predicable of man as man, an element provided as it were in a man's congenital endowment, like his racial ties or physical mortality. As yet there is no perception of the truth that sonship in the highest sense depends upon, and consists in, a moral and spiritual experience conditioned by personal choice and productive of a specific sort of character; it is not in the least a mere aspect of political or tribal status, as antiquity all but universally assumed. Stoicism does indeed point to each man's share in the World-Reason and his universal subjection to the Law of Nature. But this, manifestly, is short of the truth. What is still lacking is just that reverent communion with God, that free

adoring nearness of the child to his Father, which puts the New Testament in a class by itself. The individual has not yet learned that precisely as this one member of the family he has infinite value for the Father of our spirits; he appears to himself to count only as one unit in an unending series of equally important or equally worthless elements of the cosmic whole. This in part explains the peculiar ethos of the Stoic sage—so unimpassioned, so self-conscious, so quietly disdainful of the weaker brethren, so curiously unlike a child. After all, Jesus stands virtually alone in His day for delight in children.

Sonship, for Christianity, is then a new relation of trust and freedom toward God into which Jesus leads those who respond to His influence. We rightly call it perfect sonship because it is constituted by spiritual unity with the perfect Son. I have urged more than once that with a new idea of God everything becomes new, and of this a striking instance is the freshly-gained sense of filial life. Sonship is no longer a merely natural or ethically indeterminate relation, but one corresponding to the Fatherhood revealed in Christ. It is defined as the sonship illustrated and certified by Jesus' filial experience in life and death—the sonship to which He calls us, which He shares with us, and which is constituted by our participation in His Spirit. We are not at liberty to fix its content as we please, or to derive its moral significance inferentially from any *a priori* philosophic concept of humanity. It takes the whole career of Jesus to show what sonship is, and the presence in the New Testament of four narratives of His life is the Church's half-conscious homage to the truth that, whatever more, Jesus Christ is our Forerunner and Exemplar, as being the Father's true Son, the perfect Believer and the wholly adequate object of the Father's love. He saved men by His filial life even before He saved them by the self-sacrifice of death. The Spirit in Him touched and changed others

by contagion; He learned the depths of God's Fatherhood that He might, in the power of His realised Sonship, persuade others to seize the infinite possibility thus open to themselves. But we must break off; no verbal exposition of sonship can equal the Divine reality pictured in the Gospels. As men come, through Jesus' influence, to live toward God in an attitude of unclouded faith and obedient receptiveness, their thought of what it is to be a 'son' grows deeper. The presentation of Faith in Romans viii., to which no parallel exists in other religions, is essentially a transcript of Jesus' consciousness, mediated through Him to believers.

This specifically filial consciousness, however, derives a distinctive tone or quality from the fact that it includes, and is unrecognisable apart from, a sense of Divine forgiveness.[1] The idea of pardon is as old as religion, or nearly; but I believe it correct to say that the Bible stands alone in proffering a pardon which is not earned, still less extorted by ceremonial observance, but provided freely by God at His own great cost. In the Old Testament itself sacrifice is not conceived of as propitiating God in the bad heathen sense of inducing Him to forgo His wrath; it is rather His ordained means of preserving the covenant relation between Him and a sinful people. Similarly in the New Testament pardon is furnished by, not wrung from, the free goodwill of the Father, and the tragedy of the Cross opens a clear window upon the eternal Divine bearing of the load of sin. The moral power of the Cross resides in its being the Father's sacrificial gift. Stoicism has close affinities with the Christian conception of a universal moral order, but there can be nothing in Stoicism like Divine free pardon, because Deity, like all other being, is subject to the higher Law of Fate. By his own power man mounts, and that hardly, into the atmosphere of calm. In the last sense he forgives himself.

[1] Söderblom well remarks that the word 'love' *may* be drawn down to the level of nature-religion, but 'forgiveness' cannot.

Thus in Christianity redemption is a psychologically mediated form of experience; and this experience, in its constitutive factors, is traceable to the influence of a historical Redeemer, who is not the Leader of Faith merely but the Divine pledge and guarantee of salvation. It represents a type of life unknown before, whose moral quality transcends all religion that can be called ascetic, ecstatic, gnostic, or legal. The pure ethical quality on which I have laid stress is of cardinal importance. 'Jesus,' it has been tersely said, 'did both things: He completely moralised religion, and He secured religious motives for every part of morality.' [1]

In conclusion, let us raise the question in what respects the redeemed life enjoyed in Christianity is a greater and higher thing than Old Testament faith at its most advanced point. The following considerations seem worthy of special note:

(1) There is a new certainty of God. The assurance of God's almighty love conveyed through Jesus, and specifically through His death and triumph, is much more than the conditional certainty (as we may call it) which was all that Hebrew saints attained to. The opening verses of Psalm ciii. give incomparable expression to the gratitude and trust of the devout heart; but it is permissible to feel that if the writer had had his family massacred or had been carried off into exile, his consciousness of Divine favour, and quite definitely of Divine forgiveness, would have been seriously undermined. But the fact of Christ has given men 'boldness and access' —the joyful mood of those who have been completely

[1] Jülicher in *Kultur der Gegenwart*, I. iv. p. 64. Cf. Carlyle in *Hero Worship* (p. 98): 'Mark here the difference of Paganism and Christianism, one great difference. Paganism emblemed the Operations of Nature; the destinies, efforts, combinations, vicissitudes of things and men in this world; Christianism emblemed the Law of Human Duty, the Moral Law of Man. One was for the sensuous nature: a rude helpless utterance of the *first* Thought of men,—the chief recognised virtue, Courage, Superiority to Fear. The other was not for the sensuous nature, but for the moral. What a progress is here, if in that one respect only!'

reconciled to God. They have received an initial and irrefragable assurance of God's love which can be laid down once for all as the foundation of life. How far Christians have been able to live at this level is another story; but what differentiates the New Testament from all other books is that there we envisage the believed facts which released this triumphant gladness in men's hearts; we also see some men—St. Paul is one—whose faith was truly worthy of the glorious revelation by which he was confronted. It is significant that the New Testament contains nothing like the Book of Job. Something has happened to make men sure of the Father.

(2) In consequence, fear of the world has vanished. Not that the Hebrew sense of human fragility [1] is gone; even St. Paul can shudder for a passing moment at the thought of death, of being, as he puts it, 'unclothed.' But that frail sense of weakness in presence of the world and its destructive powers is swallowed up and lost in the exulting conviction that God's redemptive energies cannot ever be frustrated by any tragic fault of man or nature. The resurrection of Jesus, which must always be construed as morally correlative to His perfect trust in God, is a test case; it has revealed immortality in being; it is felt as exhibiting the Divine Love as omnipotently victorious, in a crucial instance, over all hostile forces, death and demons equally; it is under the canopy of this Love that the believer now lives, and not the believer only but the whole world. Christians were fortunate in having *perceived* this love, and taken in the wonder of it; but once seen to be there, it was objectively real and active, blessing the entire family of mankind. If even the Crucifixion could be transmuted into a medium of universal good, love, the apostles felt, was at the heart of things. Not even God could change the past fact of Jesus' death or abolish the wickedness of those who caused it; but He could change its value, and its value *was* changed radically

[1] Philo too dwells on man's creaturely nothingness in God's presence.

when men came in faith to interpret it as the sublime manifestation of Divine Love mediated through utter human fidelity. A new light thus fell upon the omnipotence of God which gave mastery over the world.

(3) The hope of a blessed future life is carried on to its completion. The new disclosure of God necessarily reacted upon eschatology; for in view of the Father a present redemption must contain implicitly the promise not of its perpetuation merely but of its perfecting. On this third point we may conveniently linger a moment, in the first instance fetching a circle round by the higher ethnic ideas.

It has been roundly stated that 'with regard to the belief in Heaven, in the immortality of the soul, in the reunion of the dead, and in a future retribution, the Pagan world differed from the Christian in nothing save in the grounds for such beliefs.' [1] To any one who understands the nature of religious conviction it will be obvious that we really cannot regard the grounds on which such conviction is held as of small importance, or indeed as causing no difference of ultimate meaning or quality of assurance in the conviction itself. But it is the question of fact that primarily concerns us. Aristotle taught nothing more than the indestructibility of the rational principle in man, unfettered by the chains of sense; it is not a real and personal life he promises, but the persistence of an abstraction. The earlier and profounder argument in Plato's *Phaedo* is ethical, not religious in the full sense of that word; I mean, what he insists upon is not the communion of filial hearts with the Father, but the purifying discipline of the soul in a life to come, as well as its kinship with the unseen and incorruptible. It has been rightly said that Plato lays so much stress on the individual soul that we cannot believe that he would have allowed it to lose its personality in the Absolute; [2]

[1] Farrer, *Paganism and Christianity*, p. 108.
[2] See Moore, *Religious Thought of the Greeks*, p. 163.

still, even so the eventual destiny of the soul is left in doubt, as the personal being of God is—which is natural, since these two ideas are correlative. In later Greek philosophy the case against immortality is put more strongly than the case in its favour. Epicureanism, lacking the wider outlook, could offer no prospect of a blessed future life. The earlier Stoics allowed that a good man's soul might survive individually till reabsorbed in the primal fire; while in Posidonius, and after, the fortunes of the soul are usually described in terms of a curiously intellectualistic kind.[1] The 'daimon,' or released soul, is represented as spending the interval before the next world-conflagration in 'watching the stars go round.' Thus Seneca consoles Marcia, who had lost her son, by the reflection that her dead father will be teaching her boy the courses of the stars in their neighbourhood.[2] Further, the Christian hope is intelligible and definite in a sense in which this could not be asserted, for example, of the Greek Mysteries, which addressed themselves to feeling. But even in the most religious circles, a sad uncertainty concerning the future, whether it should bring good or ill, was often expressed. The reader of Greek and Latin literature may well feel that Tibullus' lines utter the sigh of all antiquity at the gate of death: 'There are no fields of harvest below, no cultivated vineyards, but fierce Cerberus and the Stygian ferry-boat. A pale crowd, with fleshless chaps and burnt hair, wander by the gloomy marsh.'[3]

The Christian Gospel of immortality put first things first. It laid its finger on communion with God, experienced here and never to be broken, and including as part of its own implicit meaning the promise of life

[1] Epictetus held that hope is limited to this life; cf. Bonhöffer, *Epiktet und das Neue Testament.*

[2] Bevan, *Stoics and Sceptics*, p. 111.

[3] 'Non seges est infra, non vinea culta, sed audax
Cerberus et Stygiae navita turpis aquae;
Illic pertussisque genis ustoque capillo
Errat ad obscuros pallida turba lacus.' (I. x.)

everlasting. Apart from this, nothing more than survival (which many faiths have offered) can be looked for, not life in perfected form. What Scripture fixes on is the centrality of God, as the Father who will not let His children go; and the implications of this for dying men. The one question that interests Christianity is whether men do or do not attain to the destiny contained for them in Christ. It is a destiny no human powers can achieve, but we may have it as a Divine gift. And the future existence is not, as in so many eschatologies, conceived as a mere prolongation of earth. Both ethically and teleologically it is a glorified and transformed type of being, from which all moral hindrances and antagonisms have been eliminated. Thus the Christian hope closely resembles the Platonic in its keen feeling for the intrinsically unsatisfying nature of the present world; it differs by refusing to reject the finite, which it holds must be the medium and element through which we realise and enjoy the infinite and eternal.

In thus fixing upon communion with the Father as the root of the immortal hope, Christianity stands by itself. It is distinct from Judaism and Zoroastrianism in this aspect in proportion as its thought of God, with whatever profound similarities, is distinct from theirs. The Zoroastrian view of man's relation to Deity could never, owing to its at least partially legalistic conception of faith, be simple or direct. 'Dwelling in eternal light with Ahura Mazda can scarcely be imagined otherwise than as the deferential attendance of a servant at the brilliant court of his lord.'[1] What the Gospel envisages is not merely the human will bent in obedience to a Divine Sovereign, but the perfect form of that communion of a son with the Father which is real now, despite sin and sorrow, and embraces the promise and potency of complete blessedness. Happiness need not be added to this; this itself *is* happiness. To put all in a word, the Christian

[1] Steinmann, *Der religiöse Unsterblichkeitsglaube*,[3] p. 54.

hope of immortality is purely religious. It rests on and revolves round the self-bestowal of God in Jesus.

It is also this specifically Christian view of God which distinguishes its eschatology from that of ancient mysticism. If we consider the ideas of eternal life present in the Bacchic, the Orphic, and the Eleusinian Mysteries, in the Pythagorean movement, and even in certain strains of the Platonic philosophy, they seem but to presage a perpetuation of the higher life which now is ours. They speak of continuance, not perfecting. True life is now as complete as it will ever be. The typically mystical position has never been better expressed than in some early words of Schleiermacher: 'In the midst of the finite to be one with the Infinite, and in every moment to be eternal — this is the immortality of religion.' Progress there is, and strictly can be, none: the mystic experience, unrelated as it is to past and future, is complete within itself; thus too it will be after death. But Christian fellowship with God, which cannot be divided into isolated moments of ecstasy, is a permanent and progressive thing. Just because communion with the Father is morally constituted, and cannot be produced by physical or natural devices or by any technique of soul-management, progress is its vital condition. It does not form, as with the mystic, an alternative to or interruption of 'secular' occupations, but is the inspiration and the aim of all experience and all duty. In mysticism of the characteristic type, enjoyment of life eternal is a timeless rapture out of relation to our moral tasks; in Christianity it is an experience we cannot acquire or retain except in touch with the concrete realities of duty. Hence to gain at last, beyond death, unimpeded fellowship with God must mean by its very nature the completion of ethical personality.

It would of course be vain to argue that Christianity was the first to teach a blessed future life. Hebrew faith, more especially in post-canonical writers, had developed

its devout individualism in a sublime form of eschatology. But the Christian hope was bound to gain through the new grasp of the Father. The contents of hope itself were enriched, and certainly not less the grounds on which it rested. Jesus' own belief in immortality is a fact of the very first magnitude; He who knew God best and loved Him as no other has done, was surest of the life to come. As already noted, His victory over the grave and His revelation of Himself to believers as the Living One, must be construed as furnishing the crucial instance of what may be called immortality in being. In principle, this broke the destructive forces of nature at their most formidable point of incidence, and inaugurated a new career for those whom the Father has in His keeping.

Still further—and this I could wish to have put at greater length—the Christian hope evidently resumes and completes the greatest achievements of faith by its promise of an eternal Kingdom; of a blessed community no member of which can be blessed in separation from others, because all are one in God. This thought of a Universal Society, this illimitable prospect, is lacking in many high types of religion; it is absent, for example, in Buddhism, in Platonism, and indeed in mysticism of every kind. The mystic proper is a solitary, finding life shared with men a thing irrelevant to his chief aim, convinced that the ideal can be fully realised within the single soul. But in Zoroastrianism and pre-eminently in Judaism, while provision is made abundantly for the individual, devout foresight goes out to a wide horizon and beholds nothing less than a society made perfect in goodness and gladness. In Christianity, this hope of a social redemption assumes its noblest form, and there the mind of the New Testament comes to rest, as on an unsurpassable height. It is the promise of a Divine community, originated here and made complete hereafter; a community of all true sons of God, each ministering to all the Father's love and gifts.

LECTURE V

THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC

THREE leading issues may be raised and made decisive of the moral significance of a particular religion. These are, first, What ethical ideal does it propose for man, not as an individual merely but as member of a common life? Secondly, What moral energies for the achievement of this ideal does it bestow or liberate? Third, What success has it attained, or is it likely in the future to attain, in realising the ideal as conceived by it? We have now to ask in what respects Christianity differs from other faiths, even the highest, in its solution of these problems. We shall find that just because Christianity is a new religion, it has a new moral principle at its heart.

First, the Christian moral ideal. There is a possible, quite general point of view at which the Christian ideal may seem to be identical with that of all higher thought. 'That Man's nature,' it has been said, 'is to make himself a member of a kingdom whose uniting bonds are a harmony of the true interests and aims of its members, has been the burden of the ethical teaching of Christianity from the beginning, and it has found clear and strong expression in the utterances of the greatest thinkers of ancient Greece and of the modern world.'[1] Broadly speaking, this is undeniable. In the main it is confirmed by a fact at first sight surprising, namely, that neither Jesus nor St. Paul shows any consciousness of having put forward what is, at least in substance if not in form, a specifically

[1] Mellone, *Studies in Philosophical Criticism*, p. 342.

new ideal of moral life. If Jesus appears to be introducing a novel interpretation of moral conceptions and moral tasks when He says, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you,'[1] over against this we must place the explicit statement that love to God and to man exhaust the central provisions of the Mosaic system of precepts: 'on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'[2] In the light of His unwavering faith in the Divine character of Old Testament revelation, it is antecedently improbable that Jesus should have seemed to Himself to be propounding a radically different ideal from that of old time. And St. Paul, the next most revolutionary thinker, though acutely conscious of the difference Christ had made to religion, gives no sign of discarding the ethical ideal of the Old Testament: he that loveth his neighbour as himself, he declares, has fulfilled the law.[3] Judaism had but to carry out in practice its finest and most spiritual principles. For the apostle, the new moral element in Christianity did not consist in previously undreamt-of values, nor did even converts from heathenism need to unlearn the moral intuitions they brought with them—what St. Paul calls 'the work of the law written in their hearts.'[4] Indeed, he not infrequently describes the moral task of man in terms which would have gained the enthusiastic assent of every serious-minded Greek. Not that men lacked ideals, but that they came so far short of realising them, in spite of better knowledge—this, for St. Paul, was the misery of their condition.

Nevertheless, the suggestion that Christianity merely handed on an ideal which it found in possession when it came is not one that can be seriously entertained. In the first place, though 'love' had long before been recognised as the supreme duty, 'love' itself could change its meaning with deepening human experience; and unless we are prepared to say that the life and death of

[1] John xiii. 34. [2] Matt. xxii. 40. [3] Gal. v. 14. [4] Rom. ii. 15.

Jesus did nothing to fill it with new content and dilate the pre-existing conception of what love is and will do for its objects, we must hold that the central moral idea of Christianity is, in material respects, new. Clearly the apostolic writers are convinced of this. 'To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge'; 'Herein is love, . . . that God loved us and sent His Son'[1]—such passages, of which there are many, prove that an intensity and depth and sweep of meaning had come to fill this great moral idea which previously had been unacknowledged. Like all human terms, love gains its meaning through history, through intelligible experience; and so much of first-rank importance for morality had happened in the career of Jesus that even the profoundest thoughts regarding Love and its implications which the best pre-Christian minds had cherished were now modified, heightened, and suffused by a new atmosphere. The new elements are of course continuous with the old; there is no transition to a different kind of life; but we cannot say that the moral ideal is unaltered.

Secondly, and this is less disputable, Jesus' reading of the ethical ideal is altogether original in contrast to the beliefs of His own day.[2] It was original, at least, to be in earnest with the Old Testament ideal. He quite consciously taught a morality distinct from that inculcated by Pharisaic leaders; His was a morality of inwardness and conscience, and gave an interpretation other than theirs to the purpose served by moral law and to the characteristic righteousness of members of the Kingdom. The gulf between the two positions is at points startlingly wide. It was Pharisaic doctrine that ceremonial enactments are as important as the demands of mercy and

[1] Eph. iii. 19; 1 John iv. 10.

[2] Part of its originality lies in the crucial fact that it is *not* an *Interimsethik*, thereby differing radically from the ethic of Jewish Apocalyptic. See on this topic Preisker's suggestive article in *Studien und Kritiken* for 1919 (pp. 1-45). Preisker finds the root of Jesus' ethic in His religious individualism; but it must not be forgotten that for Jesus the end is the Kingdom of God, life in which is social as well as individual.

justice, with the inevitable result that higher morality ranked only as one item in the list of obligations incumbent on men. Ethics, in short, were poisoned by legalism.[1] Law gave the tone, and law is chiefly concerned with the forbidden; as a familiar Jewish maxim puts it, 'that which thou wilt not have men do to thee, do not thou to them.' In such a field, casuistry flourished luxuriantly. Further, the wide sphere of action which lies completely outside of law was abandoned to the arbitrary choices of the individual, a state of matters which was bound to produce a purely utilitarian code of ethics for daily life, and one wholly unconnected with religion. Again, if morality once be tied up with national law, men run a grave danger of believing that they owe the best moral conduct exclusively to members of their own nation, with the consequence that moral life is rendered narrow and ungenerous. To make things worse, people were challenged to be imitators of God; but then God, some teachers said, hated the wicked. The words of the Son of Sirach prove how unequivocally the lesson was taught. 'Give to the godly,' he exhorts, 'and receive not sinners; do good to the humble, but bestow nothing on the godless.' In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus took opportunity to stamp this sectarian arrogance with indignant censure.

As St. Paul complains, Judaism is the covenant of the letter, and the letter kills. Part of the Sermon on the Mount is devoted to an exposure of the ultimate immorality of clinging fiercely to the text of precepts, and one injurious result of all literalism is that conduct which has in any degree risen above compliance with the statute, promptly claims to be supererogatory and for that reason meritorious. These defects appear not merely in the practice of Pharisees but in their ideal, and they are sure

[1] Jesus gave no code, though He gave many convincing illustrations. It is misleading to say that in the Gospels, contrary to the usual assumption, we have only cases not principles; what we really have is cases in which principles burn and shine.

to induce that conscious or unconscious sophistry and hypocrisy which infect every system that pretends to cover all moral life by legislation. This is not to say that Pharisaism lacked nobler elements. We judge them unfairly, or at least on unfairly imperfect data, if we judge them solely by the Gospels. In this party, as in all others, men were to be found who lived on a higher level than their official creed. They too were convinced that we ought to love our neighbour as ourselves, that the *mind* must be set on goodness, that inward disposition counts for most, that no good act is done simply for reward. But this in no way alters the fact that morality vitally and organically united to legalistic religion must be a defective morality, with an ideal felt increasingly to be impure and uninspiring. Wherever lower elements take equal rank with higher, the whole is at a sub-Christian level.

Turning to pagan morality, we ought first of all to register the suggestive fact that many good heathen regarded the early Christians as bad, and that the educated world in particular tended to scout Christianity, when first presented to it, as an immoral and barbarous atheism. Christians were charged, not quite unnaturally, with defective patriotism as well as disloyalty to the constituted order. Some writers go so far as to reproach them with hatred of the human race. This does not wholly encourage the notion that the moral ideal implicit in the Gospel was instinctively recognised by the best pagan minds as identical with their own. Still, resemblances are clear. In the *Republic*, Plato arrives at the profoundly significant conclusion that 'the good man never does evil to any,' and that 'it is better to suffer than to do wrong'; which in no uncertain fashion points forward to the still more exacting ideal of Jesus: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.'[1] In Stoicism, again, the inwardness

[1] Matt. v. 44.

of true morality is constantly dwelt on, as in Seneca's fine saying: 'So live with men as if God saw you, so speak with God as if men heard you.' [1] In other places attention is called to the absolute necessity of an interior reformation, if men are to become what they know they ought to be. Always an ideal norm is presupposed which condemns the empirical facts of human life. And though we may not care to subscribe the sweeping assertion that 'in regard to resignation, unselfishness, public spirit, a forgiving and tolerant spirit, the ideally perfect pagan has nothing to learn from the Christian of the highest type,' [2] it is nevertheless notorious that in these forms of excellence, as well as in sensitiveness to suffering and certain kinds of self-control, real approaches to the Christian standard had been made. To quote once more Origen's question, cited in my first lecture, 'How was it possible for the gospel doctrine of peace, which does not permit men to take vengeance even upon enemies, to prevail throughout the world, unless at the advent of Jesus a milder spirit had been everywhere introduced?' [3] Where pagan morality, as truly in ideal as in practice, lagged far behind the best ethical teaching of Judaism, which Christianity took over, is in the spheres of Purity [4] and Brotherhood.

Stoicism is the noblest ethical system of antiquity,[5] with the possible exception of Neoplatonism. Its affinity with the genius of our own faith is demonstrated by the large proportion of its moral doctrine which Christianity was able to claim and adapt to its own principles. How deeply the Christian moral tradition has been indebted to Stoic conceptions of a cosmopolitan society of mankind, of the moral Law of Nature, of the limited scope

[1] *Epist.* 10. [2] Farrer, *op. cit.*, p. 169. [3] *adv. Cels.* ii. 30.

[4] Epictetus tells us we must not be too hard on men who are unchaste before marriage (*Enchir.* 47).

[5] Yet Augustine, as Mr. Lacey points out, 'found a fundamental absurdity in Stoic ethics, which bade men seek beatitude by living in accordance with nature, and at the same time advised an escape from life by suicide, if natural troubles became more than one could bear with dignity' (*Nature, Miracle, and Sin*, p. 100).

of human enactments, of the dignity of man! But the question we are now concerned with is this: How far does Stoicism anticipate the Christian ideal of loving all men as brethren and as equal objects of Divine love? In terms the anticipation might appear complete. Seneca says: 'It behoves you to live for another, if you would live for yourself.' [1] And again: 'It is required of a man to be of benefit to men, to many if he can, failing that to a few, failing that to those nearest him, failing that to himself.' [2] 'Let us give,' he pleads, 'as we should wish to receive.' [3] The same emphasis on universal brotherhood and the duty of self-sacrifice is characteristic of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, as when the latter writes, 'It is the differentia of man to love even those who do wrong'; [4] and the former quotes approvingly the story of Pittacus, one of the seven wise men, who let an assailant go, saying, 'Forgiveness is better than revenge, for while the former is the sign of a gentle nature, revenge is that of a savage one.' [5] These are but a few amongst possible quotations.

And yet we must not too hastily conclude that by loving one's neighbour Stoicism and Christianity mean exactly the same thing. Stoicism, like Buddhism, aimed not so much at love as at benevolence, or rather benevolent detachment. And benevolence is not love; there is no passion in it. The moral teaching of Epictetus rests on the assumption that nothing is really good except what is in our own power, and that we ought to stand clear of everything else. The sage ought to serve his brethren, but he errs if he admits them or their troubles to a place in his heart; and pity, like other feelings, is expressly condemned. In Mr. Bevan's careful words: 'The most that can be allowed when the Wise Man goes to console a mourner, is that he should feign sympathy as a means of attaining his object, but he must take care

[1] *Epist.* 48. [2] *de Otio*, 30. [3] *de Benef.* ii. 1.
[4] *Medit.* vii. 22. [5] Epictetus, *Frag.* 68.

not to feel it. He may sigh, says Epictetus, provided the sigh does not come from his heart.'[1] I am afraid there is only too much to confirm this verdict in the scorn Epictetus displays for women and children. Nothing could reveal better the essentially aristocratic nature of even the highest and purest ethics of antiquity.

Stoic morality is after all tainted by egoism; certainly an austere and lofty egoism, but egoism none the less.[2] As their first duty, Seneca counsels his disciples to live far from the crowd. This is in harmony with the teaching of the school from the outset, which sought the *summum bonum* in happiness, and identified happiness not with anything transubjective but with an attitude of the will. Self-sufficiency and self-culture take the world as stage and medium of their own development. Nothing that counts for much can be said to the weak, the tempted, the moral failures, the despairing; be a man wise or perverse, either way the universe keeps its fated course, and man fulfils his destiny. Anything like the idea of 'the Church' we shall seek vainly in Stoic thought. There is no spiritual fellowship in which each upholds the other. Nor does its literature afford a parallel to that vision which rose upon the Hebrew soul in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, with its revealing insight into suffering borne for a purpose wider than the life of the individual, and ultimately for the sake of the unrighteous members of society. It is not accident but inner logic that accounts for the absence of this conception of vicarious suffering as the deepest fact of human life; for the Stoic belief in personal independence as the supremely good thing, and in virtue as the supreme object because it is the one excellence completely determined by a man's own will,

[1] *Stoics and Sceptics*, p. 67.

[2] We must avoid even the suggestion that the Stoic ideal of self-realisation was *simply* selfishness. 'The Stoic school,' writes Dill, 'has the glory of anticipating the divine dream, yet far from realised, of a human brotherhood, under the light from the Cross' (*Roman Society from Nero*, p. 328).

has more than a touch of narrowness and arrogance, and fails in consequence to interpret the ideal life as essentially social in character because subservient to the welfare of a larger whole.[1] 'He that keepeth his life shall lose it' is a truth as yet undiscovered.

It is historically accurate, I believe, to say that the ethic of Jesus first raised the moral ideal quite clear of egoism.[2] In Him the spirit of morality came to complete self-consciousness, and spoke with perfect inwardness and perfect confidence of that which ought to be. The Kantian doctrine of the Categorical Imperative of Duty, in which clear philosophical expression was for the first time given to one fundamental principle of ethics, could have arisen only within Christendom. But Jesus is greater than Kant, inasmuch as Love is greater than Duty and includes it. It is good to treat people kindly because we feel that we ought to, but not by any means so good as to treat them kindly because we love them; and the saint is simply one whose power of loving other people is exceptionally large. When we try to do certain things because we think it our duty, we fail. In short, the Kantian imperative of right for right's sake will be superseded in the perfect society, when love is all in all, but the principle of Jesus will remain. Kant's ethic falls short of finality for the sufficient reason that it is ethical and nothing more.

Again, Jesus is higher than all teachers of morality who place human interest at the centre, not God.[3] Life must become theocentric before prudential morality is finally expelled and men are made conscious of

[1] Cf. Caird, *Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers*, vol. i. pp. 46-7.

[2] Mr. Montefiore writes from a Jewish standpoint: '"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself." Who can measure the effect of these striking words? Self-denial was not unknown before Jesus spoke. Yet this clear enunciation of the principle, this vivid conception of the ideal, were surely new and original contributions to the history of religion and morality' (*The Religious Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 106 f.). On the question whether the Gospel is egoistic because Jesus spoke of rewards and punishments, see Weinel in *Jesus or Christ?* pp. 35-9.

[3] The Aristotelian ethic is a fair example.

entering into a larger experience, into a potentially infinite society possessed of and enjoying the supreme good, which is guaranteed by God alike in its goodness and its permanence. Apart from this, morality will of necessity keep a certain strain of self-centred poverty of nature, an egoism which even religion is compelled to feed. The emotional cults of India, for example, make shipwreck here ; according to them, man is redeemed from the world not in order that he may serve the world, but that he may shake off, once and for all, its limitations and troubles. No great cosmic purpose summons man to be a fellow-labourer with God. 'The "supreme peace," the "everlasting region," to which Krishna brings his worshippers is no Kingdom of God, no realm of the service of love in righteousness, but a self-regarding state of personal purification and endowment.' [1]

If then we take the loving promotion of universal human brotherhood as the moral ideal proposed by Jesus and disseminated ever since by His influence, we are justified in holding that this ideal, new in intensity of meaning if not verbally, has been more effectively and consistently promoted by Christianity than by any other world-religion. Love is the organising idea of New Testament morality. The Christian ethic is primarily an ethic of brotherly love, and St. Paul rightly sees in it the signature of Christ's own life.[2] The Gospel entered a world perishing for lack of love,[3] and in the name of religion declared that no faith except that which works through love is true faith. But love is never regarded merely as an affective sentiment. On the contrary, did time permit, it would not be difficult to prove that it includes, heightens, and beautifies the cardinal virtues : the four kinds of excellence, that is, chiefly recognised by the common moral

[1] Macnicol, *Indian Theism*, p. 260.

[2] His disinterestedness and self-abnegation (Rom. xv. 2 ff.) ; His gentleness and consideration (2 Cor. x. 1) ; His love and lowliness of mind (Phil. ii. 5 ff.).

[3] Even Plato had failed 'in proportion as justice itself falls short of Love' (Temple, *Plato and Christianity*, p. 39).

consciousness of Greece, wisdom and justice, courage and self-control. It is august and commanding as well as tender. In particular it is a holy love, which in that character can be rigorously stern, insisting that the offending hand shall be cut off and the offending eye plucked out, and actually declaring that certain acts are so antagonistic to God's interest in others that it were better to die than commit them. No account of the ethical spirit found in the New Testament is true which does not recognise the tremendous moral indignation and scorn that were in Jesus. The sins which He most hated were cruelty, falsehood, and pride, and on occasion He scourged them with scathing words.

If we look round for a crucial instance of what love means for Christianity, no more searching test can be imagined than the forgiveness of injuries. The New Testament lays it down explicitly that forgiveness of our neighbour is a condition of receiving the forgiveness of God. This is a clear advance beyond the Old Testament. There, as it has been put, 'the penitent could accept and enjoy the divine pardon and yet cherish the most bitter feelings towards his own personal enemy.' [1] Higher thoughts came by degrees. First there grew up a conviction that God will deal with us as we have dealt with others; next comes a direct prohibition of revenge, followed by the command to help our enemy in distress; finally, in Lev. xix. 18, it is expressly enjoined, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This forms an epoch-making departure, even though the 'neighbour' in question is quite distinctly an Israelite or one of the 'gêrim.' On the other hand, this loftier strain of ethical teaching is all along accompanied by teaching of a precisely opposite tenor; the requital of enemies is the subject of earnest prayer to Jahweh, and the ideal saint is not seldom represented as sating his thirst for vengeance. Hence the man who wished to pay off old scores could

[1] Charles, *Between the Testaments*, p. 134.

appeal to his sacred books in support of his intention. But in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the morally noblest piece of literature older than the New Testament itself, we have a stepping-stone to the distinctively Christian view. We read there: 'Love one another from the heart; and if a man sin against thee, cast forth the poison of hate and speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile; and if he confess and repent, forgive him. . . . If he be shameless and persist in his wrong-doing, even so forgive him from the heart, and leave to God the avenging.' [1] It is obviously felt that the true aim of forgiveness is the restoration of fellowship between the estranged persons, and also that some real preparation for this can be made, even in a case of obstinate wickedness, by the retention of sympathy and the suppression of bitter resentment. There is something very noble in this voice of a Pharisaic mystic pleading for a standard of feeling to which the legalists all about him were averse, and we might almost say, averse on principle. The book in all likelihood was familiar to Jesus. Where the New Testament rises above even this late Judaistic work, and similar expressions of pagan moralists, is, I think, in its exhibition of loving pardon as an act in which the human spirit actually becomes in operation one with the Father Himself.[2] Pardon is no longer a Divine injunction merely; it is a grace in which God enables us to co-operate with His own attitude to the sinful, to do that which He does, and because He does it. This is Jesus' standpoint in announcing what Seeley has called His 'most striking innovation in morality,' the Law of Forgiveness. 'Love your enemies,' he said, 'that ye may be sons of your Father.' [3] St. Paul repeats

[1] *Gad*, vi. 3 ff.

[2] 'It is the message of which the Incarnation is the most eloquent expression, that sets free from moral impotence—the message that there is no human task too humble for its perfect discharge to be an act not of lonely virtue but of fellowship with God Himself' (A. G. Hogg, in *International Review of Missions* [1917], p. 533).

[3] Matt. v. 44-5.

the thought in his phrase, 'forgiving one another, even as God in Christ has forgiven you.' [1]

Where Christianity took an original line was not in thus bidding men imitate God,[2] but in the picture of God set before men for imitation, viz. the Father revealed in Jesus. In the experience of the Son, the Father has shown that He also submits to the supreme ethical law of serving through sacrifice. He who gives the command of uttermost love, though He might seem most qualified to exert force and authority, stoops to suffer, thereby obeying His own command. He imparts forgiveness at a price to Himself; He mediates forgiveness through pain in which He shares. It is through the felt impression of this Divine attitude that we are ourselves enabled to do love's hardest duty—forgive a bitter injury. Thus the love that constitutes the master principle of moral life is identical in God and man.

It is moreover this Spirit of Love, kindled by Divine love present in Jesus, which infuses a unique richness of meaning into the idea of Brotherhood, an idea involved in the very nature of the Christian Church and regnant, in however imperfect a degree, over its members from the first. Christian morality is social from end to end. It involves what has been called the true outwardness as well as the true inwardness of religion. This is a social morality because it is morality generated by the Spirit, and the Spirit is distinctively the Spirit of the community; so that on its other side Christian moral life is but the fact of the Spirit. It is of course misleading to suggest that this conception of the brotherhood of all rests solely on the teachings and inspirations of Christianity, for, as already noted, in a less developed form it had long been familiar to the Stoics, and it is very possible that its

[1] Eph. iv. 32.

[2] Nature religions changed into ethical religions as it came to be clearly seen that the Divine must be a moral standard or ideal for man, so that the highest norm of conduct is, in Plato's phrase, ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ, assimilation to God.

practical applications within the Christian field remained for some time less wide than those which Stoicism had contemplated. But the brotherhood instituted by Jesus in expectation of the consummated Kingdom must not be confused with the philosophic or ethical fraternities which then abounded, or even with contemporary religious societies. According to the Gospel, the morality of the brotherly life is inspired by religion. The two impulses are one; the community lives by love and mutual helpfulness not simply in obedience to moral intuitions, but because all are objects of the Father's love. Man is brother to his fellow because both are sons of God. What is really in view is a dedicated race. Love, which had made an end of the distinctions of rank and birth and sex,[1] poured down as a sunshine in which moral energies grew apace. It was moreover a love for all: this was understood as a principle from the first, though one imperfectly realised, and the Parable of the Good Samaritan as well as the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount prove that Jesus contemplated an unconditioned love to man as such far transcending the sectarian and unimaginative mutual care of Church members often displayed in after times. The temptation to repeat, as between Christian and heathen, the old hurtful division of Jew and Gentile, was at first held in check by the outward circumstances of believers, which forced them to mingle with the world, and still more by the example and teaching of Jesus Himself, for whom all men were potentially sons of God, and might become so in full reality. Where this moral idea of brotherhood fades, Christianity as a religion is enfeebled.

[1] It has taken us centuries to perceive the originality of Jesus' view of women. 'Unlike the Jewish teachers,' says Mr. Allworthy, 'He recognised no distinction in spiritual things between the sexes. The personality of women was to Him of the same value as that of men; and He regarded it as equally capable of training and development' (*Women in the Apostolic Church*, p. 2). Those who hold that 'by nature' woman is subordinate to man, and hence unfit for citizenship, buttressing their position by verses from St. Paul, may be reminded how Aristotle declared that the barbarian, *i.e.* the non-Greek, was 'by nature' a slave. The historical movement wipes out, one by one, those frontier lines drawn by custom or prejudice.

Those who maintain that Christianity supplies the religious basis essential to modern society are entitled to appeal to this rule of loving Brotherhood grounded in a common relationship to God the Father, as containing in germ the principles that underlie sound social life. It lays the axe to the root of social ostracism and racial division. It proclaims that in the essentials of humanity all men are equal, with an equality unaffected by differences of physique, education, efficiency, and character. Again, it forms the foundation-stone of belief in social freedom. 'Then are the children free,' Jesus once said with reference to the Temple Tax;[1] and His words have illimitable significance. The man joined to God in faith is free of merely statutory morality, free of convention, free of all social traditions that depress particular classes or occupations. And once more it inculcates justice between man and man, and the service of each by his neighbour in proportion to need. The concrete applications of these moral and religious convictions to the human conditions of our time cannot be outlined here, but every one can see with what piercing directness they bear upon the actual state of the world. Consciously or unconsciously they are inspiring the modern social movement. They are convictions to the creative fruitfulness of which we cannot set bounds for the future.[2]

Thus the moral ideal of the Gospel is socially not less than individually a reflection and outgrowth of the Christian view of God presented in Jesus, and fully shares its distinctive originality. The task to which Christ has called men answers, in each vital particular, to the gift He bestows.

Our second problem is: What powers for the realisation of this ethical ideal were either created or set free by Christianity as a religion? It is perhaps at this point that our faith is most evidently original. Christianity

[1] Matt. xvii. 26.

[2] On the foregoing paragraph, see Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism*, pp. 193 ff.

and Buddhism alike inculcate gentleness, patience, forgiveness of wrong, and even loving sacrifice; but they differ radically in the end or purpose for which such conduct is enjoined, and therefore in the moral driving power they provide So, too, at the birth of Christianity the pagan world had become convinced that character is the one thing needful; it failed by lack of access to a source of energy that makes bad men good, rouses the slumbering will, and ensures that the tyranny of evil shall be broken The faith that calls Jesus Lord professes to satisfy this need.

The peculiar strength of Christianity as a moral force lies supremely in its religious character and basis. For it offers God as the secret of full personal life for man, thus identifying individual morality with sanctification, and social morality with the natural behaviour to each other of the children of one Father. Morality is a religious duty. In serving the brethren in love we are actually worshipping God, their Saviour and ours. Whereas in lower religions a danger constantly exists that 'ritual' duties may take precedence over moral obligations, should the two collide, here it is plainly taught that external worship possesses only a relative, but love-inspired service of others an absolute, value in God's sight. The specifically Christian ethic, in short, flows from the religious meaning of the Gospel, and saving faith, receptive of God, sends power and life coursing through all forms of moral action. If we desire a glaring contrast to this, we have only to recollect how primitive Buddhism lost its chief moral dynamic by omitting God.

By establishing a vital union of religion and morality the new faith brought to completion a process which had undergone a long history, but had invariably broken down at the crucial point. This was the process of making all faith moral and all morality believing. Without this, religion and morality of necessity corrupt each other. The old pagan worships had failed to ethicise life largely because in temper and attitude they were political, for

worship only does you good provided you seek God for His own sake. Oriental cults were different, but any moral precepts associated with them were chiefly negative, and they unsealed no ever-flowing fount of animating and uplifting power. In Jesus, on the other hand, that fusion of faith and conduct was completed which long before Moses and the prophets had begun upon the only right lines, and morality now secured throughout its whole extent the motive power of trust in God. The danger passed of that conflict between religious and moral duties which always haunted ethnic worships; and if in later Church circles the belief prevailed that correct theological opinions are equal in importance if not superior to trust in God and the effort to lead a holy life, this certainly was no part of original Christianity. According to Jesus, worship of the Father consists in righteousness of life springing from filial confidence and prayer, moral life itself thus forming part of worship in spirit and in truth. All believers are priests, and their priestly offering is love, devotion, service of others. Pure and undefiled ritual, St. James declares, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. So that Kant is perfectly Christian when he pronounces that any attempt to please God otherwise than by a good life is mere superstition; what he failed to see is that the root and principle of a good life is faith, because no one can be good without God. Now this view of religion and morality as two aspects of a single life—the distinction between them being, since Jesus, obsolete—is in its completed form a Christian novelty. Once for all, over against all sub-Christian mysticisms, it is clearly shown that the interior life of piety is no isolated experience shutting man off from his fellows. Prayer and contemplation, rather, are indissolubly one with active sympathy and righteous dealing, for all together constitute true union with God. Prayer cannot be apart from love, nor love apart from prayer

The Christian, therefore, ought to be the best man in the world, for trust in the Father supplies an unequalled moral dynamic. The same holds good of the Christian society. It has been said pointedly that 'the chief reason why the noble ideals of the great Eastern religions do not ennoble the lives of more of their adherents is that they tend to create a spirit of despair in those who accept them.' [1] Nothing is more certain than that the vigour of moral life, whether in the individual or in nations, depends on the depth and breadth and purity of conviction about the living God. Ethical progress, in the deepest sense, depends upon trust in a power which will not suffer the fruits of human sacrifice and effort to be swept away by the annihilating forces of change, a trust which will inspire men to defy the tyranny of custom and assail the established order of things. In antiquity, the Jew alone escaped the blight of pessimism Thus the unprecedentedly close bond of faith and morality is in the Gospel a distinctive excellence. To lead an ethical life men need light; but primarily they need not so much higher ideals as triumphant power to give effect to ideals they in point of fact revere; the worst know more than the best practise. It is because Christianity drew its stores of moral energy from living faith that it became a world-religion, and if there be one indubitable lesson taught by Church history, it is that the ethical effectiveness of our religion instantly declines when attention is diverted from the central thought of the Father given in Christ.

One or two special aspects of this principle may be noted. To begin with, it is of fundamental significance that in Christianity the moral law is distinctly identified with the will of God. This message was gravely necessary at the beginning of the new era, when traditional morality was so much imperilled by the break-up, on a wide scale, of old religious belief. Here the Gospel carried on familiar truth. 'Of all books,' it has been said, 'the Bible is the

[1] *Reports of World Missionary Conference*, vol. iv. p. 320.

only one which interprets conscience as the love of God.' [1] No people except Israel had placed the content of obligation in compliance with the Divine will, or made duty the same thing as self-surrender to the majesty of the Lord. The Gospel echoes and prolongs this note. I should not myself care to say, with Hatch, that the main point of difference between the current ethics of the Greek world and the ethics of the earliest forms of Christian religion was that 'Christianity rested morality on a divine command.' [2] Taken literally, this is meagre and external. But it does bring out the fact that a change was made from the sanctions of impersonal Reason to the Father's will, and that this change worked in a healthy and desirable way. Morality unquestionably comes home to ordinary people with a new force when it is felt to be grounded in the Divine will. The well-known objection has been made to this, that it conflicts with genuine ethical autonomy; but two considerations, I think, can rightly be urged in answer. First, it was notoriously in this form that morality was conceived by Jesus. The ideal of human life He could not figure except as obedience to the Father, to One who, as perfect, wills nothing but what is perfectly good for His children. But whatever else may be said of Jesus, He is at least the great exemplar of moral liberty, in whom goodness rises up from an inexhaustible fountain, and external compulsion has no place. He was free in God and for the purposes of God. The autonomy He inculcated on His disciples had reference not to an external God but to other men, whose praise or blame should be a matter of indifference; also it had reference to their own passions, which must not be permitted to check or deflect action suggested by love. If nevertheless it be argued that the true moral law is that which a man imposes on himself, and which he obeys by his own power, we may in the second place reply that such a position

[1] G. A. Smith, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. i. p. 13.
[2] *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 158.

is intrinsically untenable, and that even Kant places man under the authority of Reason, which is more than his individual mind, although his mind is an expression of it. In other words, freedom is no more achieved by neglect of a given moral order than knowledge is achieved by neglect of the rules of logic.[1] Now, Christian differs from idealist ethics in this respect, that for the authority of Reason it substitutes the authority of God, which in fact is the best way of positing the objectivity of moral obligation, and of bringing clearness into a question which on other terms cannot be quite freed from obscurity. The Reason which commands, and which at the same time is independent and educative and redemptive of our wills, is God. Thus conceived, the Divine authority, so far from being an external heteronomous force, is a Power self-announced within, to obey which is freedom, and to which we pay the homage of our being in spontaneous reverence. To claim independence of God would be to exclude ourselves from the conditions under which alone the true moral life can be lived.

It is also worth noting, though the point is one I cannot here develop, that by binding each self to God in direct relationship Christianity avoids the incurable tendency of idealistic ethics to sacrifice the individual to society. Only so can full weight be given to the principle that persons ought to be treated always as ends, never merely as means. The Kingdom of God, as the goal of all action —or, in technical language, the *summum bonum*, by which is determined the particular content of moral law —constitutes a social order in which the individual blesses others in proportion as he himself is blessed of God.

Again, the fundamentally religious character of Christian ethics appears in the fact that in its view the struggling human will is upheld and inspired by Divine grace. The power in which we fulfil obligation is God's power.

[1] This given moral order must be construed and appropriated through our free ethical perception, if it is to constitute *our* moral world.

Paganism knew little of this. Seneca would have stared at the suggestion that man needs higher aid to achieve goodness, which is intelligible enough, since he describes the path of goodness as not difficult.

Grace at work in life to reinforce will and enlighten perception may be conceived of in different forms, and the original Christian message forces us to choose the form under which we shall conceive it. After all there is no such *thing* as grace; the one reality is a gracious God, who persuades and educates, and who evokes an utter trust 'of a kind to succour, and not annihilate, the moral personality.'[1] When we speak of grace, we must never say *it*, but always *Him*. 'It' is His personal influence. In the Gospels, grace acts through a new sense of God's Fatherhood generated by the redeeming impression of Jesus. Those who meet with Jesus, and drink in life from the felt nearness of God in Him, thereby obtain a new confidence in their own moral future; they acquire at once the courage to try a new life and power to persevere. It is the wonderful new certainty of pardon that effects the change. Even after our eyes have opened to the Divine holiness, we know that God forgives us when, in Jesus' presence, it comes home to us that He is seeking communion with our spirits and thus summoning us to labour along with Him in His moral enterprise. This infuses moral courage, it gives us back our nerve. It enables us to treat our former life as bygone and start on fresh lines. The great assurance that God has called us His children, to be organs and expressions of His will, bestows a sense of emancipation, of earnestness, of joy. This is the ethical redemption, removing misery and conveying power, which we see taking place over and over again in the pages of the Gospels. Moral renewal is here the other side of religious blessing; and just as that blessing has no real counterpart in other faiths, we

[1] Oman, *Grace and Personality*, p. 11. This is one of the genuinely rewarding books in recent theology, and like all such books it demands close study.

similarly find nowhere else the materials of true and overcoming morality. History has seen nothing like the self-accrediting fact of Christ at work upon man's moral nature, with an influence which at once humbles and exalts; by the infinitude of its demand reducing him to despair, by the impression of holy love making him a new being, to whom morality has become a matter of course, as the flower and the fruit are to the tree.

By St. Paul virtually the same truth is expressed in terms of the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit, which becomes ours through faith, breaks the tyranny of the flesh and by lifting men into a world of moral liberty enables them to realise a goodness otherwise beyond their reach or their aspiration. In the light of this moral transformation wrought in the heart by the living and life-giving Spirit, the anti-legalism of St. Paul is seen to be not merely not dangerous, but a forward step in ethics of positively decisive value. Instead of hard-and-fast commands, chiefly negative, and given from without, men now have within an inexhaustible store of power. This is a morality whose resources are all of them in faith: it is religious from end to end. Christians are made better men by a present experience of God. The idea of earning salvation has vanished once for all. Obedience, which it had been felt might flow from prudence or fear, is now the free outcome of gratitude and trust. Nor is the impulse of the Spirit arbitrary or fanatical, for its fruits are simply different aspects of the character of Jesus. 'The harvest of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, good temper, kindliness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness, self-control.' [1]

The importance of the ethical advance indicated by St. Paul's anti-legalism is not lessened by the fact that in practice certain modifications of method may prove necessary. His obvious belief was that the Spirit opens such deep springs and pours from them such a wealth of love for man that morality ceases to be a law because

[1] Gal. v. 22 (Moffatt).

it is the very breath of life. Hence he gave converts few regulations, preferring to cast them on the Spirit for guidance. This is the main principle of Christian morality, and will always be so. But in actual life, like other missionaries engaged in training immature minds, St. Paul was forced to compromise with the fact that Christians are still haunted by moral weaknesses and may therefore be challenged to impose upon themselves, for Christ's sake, a rule of discipline which, from one point of view, may be called external. He would undoubtedly have said that this is not the most excellent way. It is at best an educational contrivance. It still remains true that the Spirit has made possible a higher type of morality, and this purer life is steadily gaining control of all by whom the Spirit has been received.

Once more, the new moral dynamic provided by Christianity is owing to the place given to the personality of Jesus. Christian morality was fixed, for good and all, by His precepts and His character. Attention was thus called to a great new reality strange alike to Judaism and paganism, viz. a Life incomparable for clearness of moral perception and strength of will. Here was One whose moral powers had never been overtaxed. His words fell on conscience with inescapable truth and had as their historical coefficient a personal career in perfect harmony with their demands. Men felt they had no choice but to revere Him and seek His fellowship, in the hope of themselves coming to live in the clear light, untouched by moral darkness, where He lived. It was found that He never disappointed trust, never failed to lend that strong inspiration upon which weaker natures count. 'Thou hast reason,' said Marcus Aurelius, 'if reason does its work, what else dost thou require?' That is moral philosophy; but the name of Jesus, as if by the touch of some heavenly alchemy, transforms it into a religion.[1]

[1] 'It is the doctrine of the *incarnate* Logos that constitutes the fundamental difference between Christianity and Stoicism' (Adam, *Vitality of Platonism*, p. 181).

His known personality furnished the driving power which for so many ages has taught men so to live that He might approve their life. 'No one,' says Justin, explaining the difference Christ had made, 'trusted in Socrates so as to die for this doctrine; but in Christ . . . not only philosophers and scholars believed, but also artisans and people quite uneducated, despising both glory, and fear, and death.' [1]

When we ask precisely how the fact of Jesus has touched morality with creative inspiration, the answer is so very important as to be worth careful study. It has done so, first of all, I think, by quickening belief in the reality of goodness. In Him the sense of commanding duty lies upon all life; the model and the impulse of all duty He carried in His own filial heart. He does not, like Socrates, argue for righteousness on abstract principles, or on the ground of its utility; there is no word of that in all the Gospels. But He moved before men in the perfect severity of holiness and the perfect tenderness of love; and in view of this career, men became convinced that the highest goodness is no mere ideal but concrete and actual life, which not all the obstacles of social evil or seeming fatalities of nature could prevent from taking form here in our midst. Through Him, their minds opened to faith in God as the Power of Goodness in and over all things. But there is no more effective stimulus to good life than the conviction that right has power to be, as well as authority. To abolish moral scepticism, to persuade men that goodness is worth trying for, and that in the deepest of all senses the drift of the universe is in its favour, to prove that utter unselfishness is possible because it once was real—this must add incalculably to the moral reserves of human life. At this point there emerges yet again the peculiar strength of a historic faith.

Secondly, the person of Jesus provides a legitimate object of imitation. Long before He came, the felt in-

[1] *Apology*, ii. 10.

adequacy of precepts and oracles had created the desire to see a picture of the good life in flesh and blood which might exert a contagious power. Epicureans found the Perfect Man in Epicurus. Later Greek ethics reveals an ever-increasing disposition to personify the ethical ideal, and the search for great examples became still keener in the Hellenistic age. Seneca bids Lucilius keep always before him the mental portrait of some upright man and so live as if he were uninterruptedly in his presence. Still, pagan models failed to satisfy, and a widely-spread feeling prevailed that the exemplar of humanity was not yet in sight.[1] In a familiar sentence Seneca uttered the thought of many hearts: 'Where shall he be found whom we have so many centuries been seeking?'[2]

The imitation of Christ—which is of course at bottom something much deeper than imitation because it is union with His spirit and His life—has in the Christian past supplied one of the most potent ethical incentives. To follow Jesus has been felt to be a brief epitome of the best life. 'In His example,' one has said, 'we see that the love which must animate the life of true power, must persist in the face of all possible animosity and discouragement, in the face of torture and death, and even the sense of desertion by the God of love.'[3] No categorical imperative grips men with such vividness or energy, or with such a personal claim, as the spectacle of the very Good itself concretely embodied. Doubtless even this truth has been perverted into legalism. Over and over again the demand has been made that imitation should cover details of conduct, even of food and dress; and yet, when these eccentricities have been put aside, we may seriously

[1] 'Socrates,' writes Dean Rashdall, 'died a martyr to truth and civic duty: yet in the *Phaedo* Socrates drives his wife and children from the room with something like brutality that his last moments might be spent in undisturbed philosophical converse with his male friends' (*Conscience and Christ*, p. 84). It is only fair to add that Prof. A. E. Taylor dismisses this curtly as 'pulpit-rhetoric' (*Plato's Biography of Socrates*, p. 14).

[2] *de tranq. animi*, 7. 4.

[3] *Concerning Prayer*, p. 180.

define Christian morality as doing as Christ did, *i.e.* as free conscious obedience guided and inspired by trust in the Father. Our ideal is more and more fully to exhibit the ethical qualities found in Jesus.

Nor can we forget the singular benefit which has accrued to man from that aspect of Jesus' example which is not so much stimulating as educative. In comparing one stage of moral progress with another, we rightly consider increased clarity of vision in the ethical field as itself an important feature of progress. And the influence of Jesus, as His life shines upon the world from the pages of the New Testament, has played continuously on the human mind for the expulsion of culpable ignorance, or complacent acquiescence in false ethical tradition, as well as, in a positive sense, for the suggestion of new thoughts and fresh visions of the course of duty. In short, it has persuaded men not only to do right, but to find out what *is* right. The contemplation of Jesus will continue to yield a rich harvest of moral stimulus, but it will do more; it will (and this is equally desirable) steadily afford a fount of authentic moral illumination.

Thus from the days of the Gospels till now the imitation of Christ, the Man *par excellence*, has been one of the most animating and persuasive sources of the best human conduct. Just because He whom Christians seek to imitate is their Saviour, the more purely ethical springs of action have been affected by profoundly religious feeling. It has proved to be part of the available moral resource of Christianity that believers find themselves in touch with, and quickened by, the sympathy of Jesus their Pattern, who shares both God's life and ours. In His life, and supremely in His passion—its unselfishness, its heroism, its divine patience—the moral standard confronts men with a more arresting urgency, is more real, sure, and near to their minds than elsewhere in the past.

In the third place, Jesus has evoked in countless hearts

the passion of grateful love. 'Here,' writes Mr. Montefiore, 'was a new motive, which has been of tremendous power and effect in the religious history of the world.' [1] To the psychologist, bent on discovering exactly why men do one thing and not another, and what the tie is between faith and conduct, this is exceptionally important. The influence of Christianity on the emotions has never, so far as I know, been studied carefully; but its significance for the history of morals can scarcely be overrated. Pagan religion in Greece and Rome conspicuously failed to generate ethical enthusiasm. Even Greek ethics fell short of success largely on account of its gnostic or intellectualistic temper, to which knowledge and virtue were synonyms and the affective life tended to rank as negligible. At the birth of Christianity, however, there somehow occurred a new production and liberation of the life of feeling that reacted instantly, and with beneficent results, on zeal for righteousness. The will, students of mind tell us, is impelled by feeling-motives; by joy and sorrow, by hope and fear, by love and hatred. And the Gospel changed life radically by setting free emotions of joy and hope and love, which submerged the contrary feelings of care, fear and hatred, and diffused a moral sunshine in which goodness could rise and flourish.

In particular, loving gratitude to Christ was a constraining power. Gratitude is more than appreciation; as has been said, it rescues appreciation 'from being the mere dilettanteism of the connoisseur.' [2] Who can estimate the moral energy produced by thankfulness to Christ for His great act of love at Calvary? Who can doubt that a life in which the appeal of the Cross had created a commanding sense of indebtedness to the Crucified would inevitably, even if slowly, acquire a moral quality resembling Jesus' own nature? It is as certain as anything can be that gratitude for Divine favour did not

[1] *The Religious Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 132 f.
[2] Phillips Brooks, *The Influence of Jesus*, p. 28.

begin to be an ethical motive-power when Christianity appeared, but it is also certain that its intensity and power then rose to a point never before attained. If it be said that all such emotions are essentially fleeting, the rejoinder is that they may be indefinitely reproduced by renewed contemplation of Jesus, who is an unchanging part of reality, and that by degrees they tend to create a permanent mental atmosphere whose reflex action on character is of the most positive kind.

No one, I suppose, can read the Gospels and not perceive that Christian morals, as set forth in Jesus, have gained immensely by their new simplicity. Goodness may still be difficult, but at any rate it is now easily recognisable. First things are first, and externalities recede into the background. Many points that fill a large place in the Pharisaic programme do not count for Jesus. Fasting and ritual may be convenient, but they are not universally incumbent; they are not duties in the sense of being necessary expressions of the law of Love, the will of God. For Jesus there is a single end of life. The aim of all is one, with every trace of confusing multiplicity in moral intention once for all eliminated, and isolable precepts are but vivid illustrations of how the Father's child will behave when acting in conformity with his new nature. How far different this was from the Rabbinic, and even the Stoic, tendency to multiply rules for the conduct of human life is a thought so familiar that I will not dwell on it. By its simplicity the Christian ideal of love offers a practical and consistent criterion of all action. Not only does it furnish a standard by which to measure the 'happiness' in which eudaemonism places the end of all action rightly called moral; it likewise provides the last test of the 'progress' which evolutionary ethics definitely fixes on as the immanent significance of all history, thereby virtually identifying civilisation and morality. For not only does the law of Love enable us to distinguish change from progress; by its religious character it also justifies

the faith that history is, on the whole, an ever-increasing manifestation of the good.

In this section of the argument, I have in the main been dealing with the distinctively religious quality of Christian ethic. Of this no better instance could be found than the place it gives, in the life of personality, to Work. We search vainly in Hellenism for any acknowledgment of work as a vital factor in moral life, any expression of the toiler's personal joy in his toil.[1] The Greek view of the ideal career as one of leisure unspoiled by care or labour, save those of philosophy or statesmanship, still prevailed. And to the Indian mind the world is too unreal, too fleeting and unworthy, to have spent on it the thought and pains of the human spirit. But Christianity carried over from Judaism an honourable view of labour, and raised it to the highest level by representing man as the fellow-worker of God, Himself the great worker. 'I have finished the work Thou hast given me to do' is Jesus' claim.[2] This is a moral principle which has transformed many values. In the light of Christ's experience the world began to see that fidelity to vocation is not attached to religious faith by any fortuitous or external bond; rather it forms the only ethical medium in which religious faith can live.

Our final problem is concerned with the success of Christianity in its great moral enterprise. Has it realised its new ideal to any purpose, and are there substantial grounds for the contention that its ideal will in the future be perfectly realised?

It is much too often overlooked that in what is perhaps the profoundest sense of all the Christian ideal can never, at least in the present world-order, be attained. Part of its vital meaning is that it should be transcendent, not immanent merely: ever securing an approximate

[1] This is to some extent a declension from Hesiod, for whom toil has a Divine sanction.

[2] John xvii. 4.

realisation in the progress we make towards it, yet ever flying before us as we move. 'Christian holiness,' writes Dr. Figgis, in words not too strong, 'is not only never achieved in perfection, but it is far less nearly and less frequently achieved than the ethical ideas of Pagans or Mohammedans.'[1] And this is precisely what we should expect. We cannot after all conceive the soul as a static, fixed, self-identical substance, planted in unchangeable relations to unchanging moral facts; its nature is to be a continuous self-realising or self-organising process. It *is*, indeed, as it grows. To claim a once-for-all-completed achievement of the ethical ideal, therefore, would imply that experience itself had terminated. Personal relations would have ceased to be, and would have been replaced by something falling under the category of the mechanical or inanimate. No longer could the soul have a *history*. Again, obedience to known claims of the Divine will invariably pours light on still higher obligations. What is gained by true dutifulness is not by any means solely a firmer habit of duty, but much more—a deeper and finer perception of good as such, with its higher and possibly more painful obligations, and a more unerring insight into its application to relationships with other lives. There is a constant renewing of the mind in the interpretation of life and in foresight of the moral possibilities contained in the future. Fresh outlooks, as well as increasing power to fulfil them, are the fruit of progress. To close the record at any point, therefore, and wind up the business of morality, would necessarily form a contradiction; it would be to contend that the ideal was now all realised, while at the same time, now as ever before, new vistas of hitherto unimagined right action would have opened. 'The practical consciousness of the moral ideal,' says T. H. Green, 'implies the continued action in the individual of the same spiritual principle that has yielded those forms of life and character which

[1] *Churches in the Modern State*, pp. 3, 4.

form the subject of our moral definitions; its continued action as at once compelling dissatisfaction with the imperfection of those forms, and creating a sensibility to the suggestions of a further perfecting of life which they contain.' [1]

Hence it behoves us all to use the words of soberness when speaking of the moral triumphs of Christianity. In the deepest sense of all the nature of our religion forbids not only individual but corporate self-congratulation on our virtues; we are forbidden to believe that there has been all that quiet steady growth of brotherhood which might have been anticipated from the new powers Christ made available. History confirms this penitent reflection. Sometimes by minute investigation of a whole period, sometimes by the light of an awful and unmistakable conflagration, illumining the world, it reveals the total absence from vast stretches of human life at once of love and of mutual understanding. But when we ask whether the deduction must be drawn that, as a moral force, Christianity has failed, two observations are in place. First, if Christianity has failed it is only in the sense that it has not so far prevailed on the majority of mankind to put it to the proof. The ethic demanded and inspired by Jesus will never fill the world, so to say, by spontaneous generation; consecrated men and women must, one by one, give themselves to the task of receiving its powers and actualising its great precepts. Secondly, there is substantial ground for hope in the ever-renewed penitence and self-distrust of Christendom. All is not lost while men remain so poignantly aware of the wide gulf between reality and the acknowledged ideal.

How far the Christian religion has elevated moral life above the point to which pre-Christian ethical forces would of themselves have carried it, is a computation almost as confused and unrewarding as that in which optimists and pessimists delightedly engage with the

[1] *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 3.

hope of determining whether the world's balance of happiness is on the right or the wrong side. But we may venture the statement, without fear of refutation, that wherever Christians have brought their faith to bear on their conscience, the results have been significant. In numberless instances the higher morality of Christian people has been by far the most powerful missionary appeal they could have made to their environment. In the first century the Gospel exerted its attraction largely through Christian lives, in which a new ethical force appeared ; and ever since the beauty of holiness, its flame lit from Jesus, has made its convincing impression. But I prefer in conclusion to emphasise two points :

(1) The Christian principle contains vast resources which as yet are unexhausted and even unexplored. For doubt whether the distinctively Christian ethic is a new thing in great measure results from our slow discovery of the implications of its central idea : Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The ideal, whether in the New Testament or to-day, is not in the least a finished article ; it is a growing, expanding principle, and of the Church's moral achievement in history it is as true as of her eschatological consummation that 'it doth not yet appear what we shall be.' [1]

At the present moment there is a keen feeling that where Christianity has still to prove itself is the sphere of corporate relationships. Not that we need fear the issue. Jesus provided no elaborated social ethic ; He gave a seed of faith, calling men brothers because all of them God's sons, and this impulse He committed to development as its law of life. Since then there has been 'a process, a direction or movement, a running stream of aspiration, effort, and achievement—a thing ever becoming, and never become.' No such thing as a stationary ideal is erected, closing the way of progress. Christianised man is committed to his own experiments ;

[1] 1 John iii. 2.

to every kind of ethical application, adaptation, correction, and revision of experience. There can be no guarantee beforehand that all such experiments will strike the true line. No mode exists of knowing whether we are on the way to truth except the process of insight deepened by experience. Probably few will question that some at least of these developments are legitimate and lasting—for example, international law, arbitration, and in a real sense, socialism. Progress in the past centuries entitles reasonable men to hope steadily for the future, and trust in the Father countersigns and glorifies the hope. We are not wrong in believing that Jesus will reign over 'those many relations of life in which our responsibility is shared with others and yet is real.' And though we need not hold that the word will necessarily come through professedly Christian men, since the highest ethical standards are often found outside religious circles, yet, be it spoken through believer or unbeliever, we may well be convinced that the Spirit of Jesus *will* speak the last word on the morality of industry, commerce, civic government, national politics, international affairs. The truth that in Christ there is neither bond nor free failed to abolish slavery in the lifetime of the apostles, but slavery did disappear before the spread of Christian feeling. And similarly, as the Gospel stopped gladiatorial conflicts, we may dare to think it will stop war. All who follow Christ are summoned to grapple with these problems—not without the reinforcement of all wise and energetic 'secular' minds—in the conviction that in Christ's religion they possess the secret of social health, and that any society or world-civilisation that scouts His way of life, and continues to build on selfishness, must go down in ruin.

(2) The Kingdom of God, which is as much moral as religious, has before it the prospect of eternity. When Jesus gathered the disciples round Him, in a fellowship of faith and love, He called into existence a society which is potentially co-terminous with the human race, but a

society which can never become adequate to its own idea within the conditions of time and space. The realisation of such absolute values as those which the Kingdom promotes and embodies, just because they are values reaching beyond the power of law or change, must demand a transcendent world-order on the farther side of death which shall bring to perfection the germs and beginnings of earthly good, in a complete union of all members of the Kingdom with God. Hence it is in view of this infinite hope that we must estimate the eventual success of Christian moral endeavour.[1] Whatever is distinctive and supreme in the faith concerning eternal life created by Jesus, communicates its own infinitude to Christian belief in human progress, alike for the individual and for the Divine community apart from which the individual is unreal.

[1] 'The light of heaven, using the term heaven as a little child uses it, lies on every particle of genuine Christian morality' (Denney, *Expositor*, sixth series, vol. iv. p. 436).

LECTURE VI

THE ABSOLUTENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

In the foregoing lectures we have been engaged with an inquiry, too brief and imperfect I am well aware, into the originality of the Christian message. We have striven to isolate the new elements in the Christian view of God, of the Divine saving action, of the redeemed experience, and of the ethic inspired by the Gospel. I trust we may claim that in some real measure the novelty and unprecedented range of Christian conviction about all these crucial matters has been brought out. The new religion is in no sense a reproduction or revised version of older faiths. Pre-existing ideas, when they reappear, enter into new combinations and gather new significance, while the great fact of Jesus Christ imparts originality and distinctiveness to the whole.

With all this behind us, however, a fresh and extremely formidable problem emerges. Assuming the newness of the Gospel, as irreducible to the plane of earlier ethnic faiths, can we further say that this new Gospel is 'absolute'? Is it God's final word to man? It may be the highest religion within human reach at the moment, but may it not eventually be displaced by a religion higher still? 'Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?' Doubtless the Gospel was an innovation in the first century, and may still be unrivalled; but are we justified in concluding that it will never be rendered obsolete by the advent of a revelation more perfectly suited to the spiritual needs of men? This question is of such importance that any serious discussion

of the originality of the Gospel must, in the interest of faith not less than of theory, be accompanied and in one sense completed by an investigation of its finality. To this topic let us now turn.

One preliminary point we may glance at, before embarking on our main business All of us agree that Christians did not cease to appropriate religious truth when the Apostolic Age was over. It is not to be thought of that within at most three generations the whole significance of Christ should have been understood and transmitted to posterity, Divine enlightenment then ceasing, or that Christianity could have retained its spiritual character under conditions so mechanical. Nor does the New Testament suggest anything of the kind. Especially in the Johannine conception of the Spirit, provision is made for an ever-advancing appreciation of the person of Jesus. The Spirit, it is promised, will guide believers into all truth. The Church has never quite forgotten this promise; we may perhaps say that the succession has never altogether failed of those who maintain that new light will always continue to break out from the Word of God. Even within the Roman Church thinkers like Newman have risen up to urge that doctrine has developed positively as the centuries moved on; doctrine, that is to say, is unfolded which was not there before, though the new truth harmonises with the original revelation. It has been found nearly impossible to flout experience by denying all growth in spiritual knowledge, in moral insight, in altruistic and missionary impulse, or by ignoring the fact that such growth is ultimately traceable to God from whom all strong and holy thoughts proceed.

Is this a new revelation, or is it solely a better apprehension of the unique revelation contained in Christ? I own this strikes me as but a matter of words. If the present-day Christian mind is in possession at any point of a wider

or completer understanding of what the Gospel implies for human redemption, this does not mean that Christ has been transcended; it means simply that the Church is gradually deciphering the content of His significance. In that sense, if we care to use the word, it *is* a new revelation, adapted to the world's ever-changing needs. We may fairly let ourselves be guided by the instinct of the Fourth Evangelist. According to his mind, there is nothing accidental or alarming in a continuous advance beyond the traditions of the past. 'The Spirit is the perennial source of new revelation, and yet this new revelation is only the unfolding, ever more largely and clearly, of what has already been imparted in the life of Jesus. All our knowledge of God and His truth is ultimately derived from the historical manifestation, which conveys a different message to each succeeding time, but can never be superseded.'[1] The mind of Christ is perpetuated in His disciples, interpreting the life and truth He brought in ever new forms. But that which thus originates is not a new religion.

Premising then the truth of Christianity as the Gospel of sonship, of unrestricted access to the Father, mediated through Jesus, we have to ask whether of this Gospel we can predicate absolute value. Have we good grounds for the conviction that our religion is unimprovable[2] and will never be antiquated by the rise of a better faith?

The conviction just formulated has been attacked from three distinct points of view. It may be said, first, an

[1] E. F. Scott, *Fourth Gospel*, p. 357.

[2] There is certainly nothing in the history of Christianity that corresponds to the improvement in pagan cults thus described by Dill: 'In times of moral renovation, and in face of powerful spiritual rivalries, a religion may purge itself of the impurities of youth. Religious systems may also be elevated by the growing refinement of the society to which they minister. It is only thus that we can explain the undoubted fact that the Phrygian and Egyptian worships, originally tainted with the grossness of naturalism, became vehicles of a warm religious emotion, and provided a stimulus to a higher life. The idealism of humanity, by a strange alchemy, can marvellously transform the most unpromising materials' (quoted by Angus, *Environment of Early Christianity*, pp. 89-90).

absolute religion is a contradiction in terms. Or secondly the absolute religion, which does exist, is not Christianity, but either Judaism or Buddhism. Or thirdly, the absolute religion has not yet appeared, but in due course it will appear and will prove to be an amalgam of Christianity and some other faith, Buddhism for choice. These positions we must examine one by one.

(1) The case against the possibility of an absolute religion may be summarised as follows Belief in an absolute religion, it may be said, presupposes that the development of religion on through its successive forms means, or at all events is accompanied by, a steady increase in the truth of its content—that is, of its religious and ethical affirmations. Now there exists no measure of the truth of its content unless we can lay our hand on a fixed unchanging conception of what religion essentially is, by which the approximating truth of these successive forms can be gauged. It has indeed often been contended that we do possess this unchanging conception ; but on examination it invariably turns out to be simply a logical generalisation drawn from actually existing forms of faith. Once made, this generalisation has illegitimately been invested with absoluteness. Manifestly there has been a circular argument. The supposedly absolute standard is itself derived from the historical phenomena which it apparently enables us to rank as relative ; not only so, in one particular case we claim that the absolute standard has been satisfied, yet this particular is equally relative with the others. Thus no absolute norm of what religion is exists, and therefore no absolute religion.

Again, modern thought tends to find the primary and fundamental factor of religion not in idea or dogma, but in the soul's experience. But at this point of view, the notion of absoluteness or finality is unthinkable ; it would imply that experience, which is never-ending, was somehow closed. Or, to put it otherwise, does not an absolute religion mean one which is the same for every-

body? And has not James in his captivating Gifford Lectures demonstrated the infinite variety of types of pious life? Experiences so different cannot possibly be reduced to a common denominator How, for example, shall the once-born and the twice-born house together in a single faith? How shall the mystic live under the same roof with the man whose religion runs to moralism? No single norm can be conceived by which religion everywhere should be valued and corrected. By demanding conformity we violate the overflowing freedom of life.

At the moment I can only reply as follows. The first objection rests upon two assumptions, one logical, the other religious. To begin with, it assumes that if a religion cannot be logically proved absolute, then it is not absolute. To this we reply by granting unreservedly that irresistible logical proof of the finality of the Gospel cannot be given, while, as we shall see later, Christianity may be final notwithstanding. Further, in this particular form of the rejection of the Gospel's claim to absoluteness, it is assumed that the Gospel is not true. It is very doubtful whether any one who understands what Jesus meant by the Fatherhood of God, and who believes Jesus' meaning to be objectively valid in the sense that there is just such a Father in heaven as He proclaimed, can intelligibly hold that this truth could be replaced by something better. Here then we have a position antagonistic to the absoluteness of Christianity because it is antagonistic to Christianity itself.

The second objection really denies that belief is an element of religion, and this I must take leave to put aside without discussion It is out of harmony with the results of the best modern psychology. We may take it that the three ultimate modes of being conscious, the three attitudes of feeling, cognition, and conation, are all involved in a religious mood or act, and that they function as a concrete unity. For the rest, I can only hope that when we come to ask what the claim of Christianity to be

absolute means, we shall discover room in our faith at once for all highest types of spiritual experience and for infinite progressiveness.

(2) It has been contended that the final faith is not Christianity, but some other religion. And this is a view which deserves close attention. Christianity, I believe, has three great modern rivals. One is Secularism, resting on agnosticism as its theoretic basis—the doctrine, in short, that nothing higher or better than human beings as they are, is known to exist. But this is not a religion at all, and we may leave it undiscussed. The second rival is Judaism, which has already been considered at various points in the argument. Buddhism remains as the third—a pantheistic type of faith, or view of the world, not without a strong attraction for some of our contemporaries. If, however, Buddhism be found to stand on a lower ethical level than Christianity, its claim to absoluteness goes by the board.

Unfortunately I have to put the matter rather succinctly, and as my purpose is to exhibit Buddhism as in certain aspects inferior to Christianity, I may seem to speak in a tone of undue disparagement. But if we recollect that Buddhism is actually older than Christianity by four or five hundred years, if we form a just picture of the world in which it appeared and to which it was taught by the young Indian prince, Gautama, who was to become the Buddha, how can we withhold a tribute of frank admiration? Gautama was a great and sympathetic personality. Sensitiveness to pain, fineness of inner feeling, and persistent purpose were perhaps his most striking qualities, and nothing can be more unhistorical than to picture him as a weak or irresolute nature, or indeed as anything but a man of singular moral strength and constancy. We cannot disregard the fact that Buddhism put a message of Redemption at its heart, that it has proved itself a missionary faith on the great scale, that it signalised a notable advance in morality by its

strict prohibition of hatred and its emphatic commendation of universal mildness and forbearance, and that it insisted uncompromisingly on a soul cleansed from worldliness. In view of this, it may be mistaken but it is not insane that it should have claimed equality with the religion we profess; while also it might seem to possess a higher fitness for to-day inasmuch as it does not appeal for belief in miracle, and is throughout rationalistically agnostic in temper.[1] But we have to look at the other side. A religion's quality is determined by the figure who stands at its fountainhead; and the one question therefore is, Which is greater, Gautama or Jesus? Which had more to give the world? 'Wherever we open the Gospels,' says Oldenberg in his standard work on Buddha, 'we find the tenderest and profoundest traits of Jesus' influence, as it moves from life to life, to bless, console, heal, enrich, and strengthen. How far different is the picture which the Buddhist Church has kept of its Master's work—how infinitely poor in everything that touches the secrets of personal being! Living humanity is lost in the scheme, the formula. There is no one to seek and comfort the suffering and sad: ever and again what fills the eye is the pain of the whole world, diverting attention from every case of individual pain in order that the spirit may gird itself for the journey by which we pass beyond all pain.'

Ethical terms require personal life as their exponent, and on a closer view 'love' means one thing on Jesus' lips but another on Gautama's. The meaning of love for Jesus is determined by His Cross, which implies something more, and more efficacious, than abstention from enmity. The reader of Buddhist books might at first sight suppose that the characteristic feeling of this religion is a high unselfishness, but a deeper search reveals the fact that unselfishness here connotes, as a great missionary puts it, 'not the yielding of one's own claims to the rights

[1] For proof that even Buddhism requires an act of faith, see K. J. Saunders in the *International Review of Missions*, 1918, p. 118.

and claims of others, but rather the effort to withdraw oneself, for what are ultimately selfish reasons, from all connection with the world of existence around us.'[1] The Buddhist monk is a fugitive from life (and only the monk can really attain the true goal of being) :

> 'E'en as the tortoise in its own shell's shelter
> Withdraws its limbs, so may the brother holding,
> Composed, intent, thoughts in his mind arisen,
> Leaning on naught, injuring ne'er his neighbour,
> From evil freed wholly, speak ill of no man.'

It was therefore an inconsistency in Gautama, though a noble one, that instead of retiring into privacy with his new-found secret, he resolved to communicate it to mankind. Once he had attained the supreme insight, bringing his mind into a state in which it could see and feel the illusory nature of things, the logic of his position demanded suicide, the immediate willed entrance on Nirvana. He lived on, preaching redemption to others ; and scholars have pointed out how Buddhistic tradition has marked its half-conscious sense of the inconsistency. Legend tells that when Gautama of his own motion had resolved to enter Nirvana, the supreme God, perceiving the danger, came down and opened his eyes with sympathy for souls thirsting for salvation. Thus accidentally, in Buddhism itself, the still small voice is heard of a Divine Love that cares for men and would have man care for his brother. But what in Buddhism is a sudden inconsequence is for Jesus the meaning of the world.

Orthodox Buddhist teaching, however, warns men to love nothing either in heaven or in earth. By detachment we escape pain, and to escape pain is the one thing needful. It is the antipodes of the great command : 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.'[2] Nor do we find in Buddhism any coherent counterpart to that higher love of the world—which God

[1] Campbell Gibson, *Mission Problems*. p. 106. [2] Luke x. 27.

Himself loved [1]—to which, in spite of an equal dislike of worldliness, the Gospel has always pointed. We are manifestly dealing with an earlier form of Stoic 'apathy.'

Buddhism, like Christianity, is specifically a religion of redemption, and in the forefront, as man's sorest trouble, it puts that all-pervasive suffering which is not an accident of life but its inseparable core. Now the Jesus of history is far from minimising pain. Salvation as He gives it is a comprehensive supernatural deliverance from sin and death ; it includes the healing of all diseases, the righting of all wrongs. But reconciliation with the Father is primary. Further, it was through pain that Christ achieved redemption ; in this path He bids disciples follow in His steps, thereby assuming that suffering is not purely evil from every point of view but can be so received and inwardly transmuted as to mediate spiritual gain. But Gautama is represented as having begun his ministry under an overwhelming impression of the unfathomable pain of the world, which robbed him of all will to live. Life, *qua* life, is misery : this is inherent in experience as such and does not form the consequence or penalty of anything. Being is badness, with a badness that becomes self-conscious in man ; and it *is* bad because suffering, its living fibre, flows inevitably from desire, and to cease desiring we must cease to be. This fear of life is terribly sharpened by the doctrine of reincarnation, according to which men have no prospect but that of ever being born over again to suffer and die, in ever-renewed separation from the objects of love. Hence the will to live, the life-lust, must be totally eradicated if man is to be saved. Everywhere the same Gospel of sheer negation ; no desire, no pain, no life. For Buddhism this is the only available method of dealing with the three characteristics which, as Hackmann puts it, inhere in all things, 'transitoriness, misery, and the lack of an ego.' [2]

Let there be no misconception : what is proffered here

[1] John iii. 16.

[2] *Buddhism as a Religion*, p. 27.

is not, as with Jesus, the redemption of life, but redemption from life itself. Both Christ and Buddha have been described as conquerors of death, but manifestly the phrase bears in the two cases an utterly divergent sense. Buddha's teaching redeems from death by preparing man for the obliteration of consciousness; Christ by uniting man to the living and loving God (Who, and not Nothingness, is the last and highest reality) in a spiritual bond to which death can make no difference. The supreme boon offered by Buddhism is not eternal life in God here and hereafter, but 'Nirvana,' a word borrowed from the extinction of a lamp. In Nirvana

> 'to utter ending comes
> This compound thing of body and of mind.'

There has been infinite discussion as to the meaning of Nirvana, but we are at least justified in venturing the statement that the condition indicated by the term has no positive content. Trouble and pain cease in Nirvana because the man himself ceases. It is a purely individualistic ideal; it recognises no such social completion of the redeemed life as the Kingdom of God pictured by Jesus. And it is preponderantly negative, with no place for Truth, Beauty, Goodness. How widely removed from Jesus' outlook, 'I am come that they may have life, and have it to the full'![1]

The two religions are also diametrically opposed in their views of the pathway to redemption. Gautama teaches that to be saved is to escape from a wretched and fatal illusion due to the depraved action of our own minds. We need most of all a new point of view. The Buddha himself attained the goal not by asceticism or ecstatic contemplation but through calm, penetrating, persistent reflection—such reflection as unveiled to him the equivalence of life and misery. Higher knowledge leading to total suppression of the will is thus the secret,

[1] John x. 10 (Moffatt).

and Gautama is 'the Illumined.' Man is cast upon his own resources for salvation, in the sense that he is challenged to gain such philosophic insight into the nature of being as will lead him to mortify all activities whatsoever. To be redeemed is to have perceived the vanity of things. Wisdom is necessary, but a wisdom which so far from inspiring men to grapple with wrong or folly bids them retire from the conflict; with the result that Buddhism has scattered the seeds of death in every social structure into which it has found a way. Jesus offers us truth indeed, but truth embodied in a radiant and overmastering personality: He appeals to the will, and when the will fails mobilises the conscience, so presenting God throughout as to evoke and satisfy the great abiding elements of manhood—reason, will, and heart. 'All souls are mine,' says the God revealed in Christ, not wise and prudent thinkers merely. 'Repent,' was Jesus' cry as He began His ministry; 'be instructed,' said Buddha. It is not the difference between truth and power; but between human understanding rising by self-stimulated effort to the peaks of enlightenment and such true insight into the character of God as means a new way of life. Gautama taught his doctrine quietly and fruitfully and finished his earthly career aged and honoured, passing gently into extinction; Jesus, who taught not less persistently but also wrestled in agony with evil, perished on a cross after the most terrible of deaths, and thereafter, in the great words of St. Paul, was 'installed as the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.' [1] It is the victory not of death over life, but of faith and love over death.

These characteristics of Buddhism, it may reasonably be urged, are all of them derivable from its non-theistic and therefore pessimistic attitude to life. It is indeed the one case in history of pessimism appearing as a religion. Strictly we may describe it either as philosophy or as

[1] Rom. i. 4.

moral system, and the second description is the better; but if we insist on calling it a religion, it is at all events religion without an object. No one has the right to deny that the Buddhist enjoys feelings of reverence and awe, of unity, of harmony, even of deep peace and gladness; still, such feelings are unrelated to any transubjective reality. Buddhistic literature, it is true, has much to say concerning divine or demonic beings, yet these are in no sense helpers of man but part of the wheel of life from which we must escape; hence, whatever may have happened later, primitive Buddhism is devoid alike of worship and of prayer. But in point of fact nothing is more suggestive than the way in which later Buddhism has reversed the teaching of its founder. With the lapse of time, as Mr. Saunders has shown, 'Buddhism allowed its excessive pessimism and its denial of God and of the soul to drop into the background, and found room for trust in God and for prayer; for heaven and the hope of immortality.'[1] Human longing proved too powerful an antagonist of tendencies which its founder had impressed upon it. Buddhism would die were it to return to its origins, whereas Christianity springs to ever new life by recovering touch with Jesus. This is one evidence the more that Gautama's position in Buddhism is by no means analogous to that held in His religion by Jesus Christ. The true Buddhist teaching is entirely separable from Gautama, who is but one of an indeterminate and unfinished series, but Jesus knows no more sacred duty than to lead men to Himself.

Looking back, we may claim superiority for the Christian faith on two main grounds. First, since it is really as a system of ethics that Buddhism must be judged, we note its fundamental ethical sterility. Why should we strive

[1] *International Review of Missions*, 1917, p. 166. 'The genuine Buddhist ideas,' Hackmann declares, 'in their subtle philosophical character do not satisfy or grip the simple individual. They have to be coarsened and completed, therefore, in order to meet the common needs of humanity—as for instance by substituting Paradise for Nirvana, and by a doctrine of God and the soul' (*Buddhism as a Religion*, p. 296).

for character or sacrifice present pleasure to an uncertain future, if within a short span we shall be as if we had never been? Reality cannot be made the medium of good; the ultimate secret of things is dark, unhappy Fate. Jesus ushers men into a life of boundless promise, but here we see an end of all perfection in the cruel nothingness of existence, a discovery which cuts the nerve of all genuine moral endeavour. Christians believe that every true achievement becomes, as it were, a funded part of the Divine Kingdom, and that every gift obediently used is destined to open in Christ's light into before unconscious and unsuspected power; but progress is an idea which consistent Buddhism must reject. And to negate progress on principle is to relinquish the hope of specifically moral life.

In the second place—and here we touch bed-rock—the substantial framework of Buddhism is pantheistic monism, of a kind that discredits personality as but 'a momentary wave upon the ocean of eternal oneness.' I grant without reserve that no constraining or logically irrefutable arguments can be led for the ultimate truth of personality in God or man. We have to choose, with an intensely moral choice. No species of deduction from premises acknowledged on both sides of the debate can absolve us from the necessity of deciding for ourselves. We are doubtless entitled to argue that the main current of man's religious experience has been moving in the direction of personalism, the conception of God becoming ever more ethical and spiritual; yet this position itself is an indemonstrable conviction or judgment of value. Let a man prefer pantheism, and Buddhism may have his vote; if at bottom he is a personalist, he cannot but claim the higher rank for Christianity.

(3) It has been contended in modern times that the absolute religion is still to come. In the voluminous and rewarding books of Troeltsch, as every reader knows, passages may be found in which he seems for a moment to play with the idea of a new religion yet to arise in which

the Christian sonship may be supplanted by a still richer and profounder relation, of which we naturally cannot so far form a clear conception ; [1] and to this nobler hypothetical faith Christianity is conceived as standing more or less as Judaism did to the Christian Gospel. There might come, he suggests, such a disclosure of the innermost nature of being as to render us dissatisfied with Christianity. Ethical demands might be made upon us which as Christians we could not meet. He attempts indeed to calm the misgivings which this prediction, if believed, might not unintelligibly provoke by the reminder that all the best things in Christianity would be preserved in any better worship destined to replace it. But obviously no one can be sure whether they would in point of fact be preserved, until we have laid before us more definite information regarding the nature of this imagined future faith. If it were, say, an amalgam of Christianity and Buddhism, as Pfleiderer used to hint, we should have to surrender at least the Fatherhood of God, the forgiveness of sins, and the hope of a blessed life to come.

In any case, to invite Christians to hold their belief in the absoluteness of Christianity with a loose hand on the merely logical chance that something better may turn up, nobody can tell what or when, rather recalls the eighteenth-century projector who announced a Company 'for an undertaking which shall in due time be revealed,' each subscriber to pay at once two guineas, and afterwards to receive a share of a hundred, with a disclosure of the object.[2] But instead of dealing now with Troeltsch's somewhat intangible hypothesis, I shall hope to treat of it by implication when discussing the finality of our religion on its own merits. In advancing to this question we may take courage from the reflection that no other ancient historical religion except Christianity has so far

[1] Cf. *Die Absolutheit des Christentums* (2te Auflage, 1912) : 'We cannot really exclude the possibility that a higher revelation might uncover yet deeper postulates' (p. 90).

[2] See Lecky, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii. p. 156.

proved able to hold its own in the presence of modern thought.

If we inspect the apparently simple proposition, 'Christianity is absolute,' we find, as perhaps we should expect, that both terms 'Christianity' and 'absolute' are equivocal. It will be agreed that a statement in which subject and predicate are equally ambiguous stands much in need of scrutiny. To take the predicate first: we speak of God properly as absolute, as the absolute personality; and Christianity, it is clear, can scarcely lay claim to the epithet in the precise sense in which it belongs to God, otherwise we should be in the untenable position of affirming two absolute entities in a single universe. God is transcendent and somehow above the sphere of temporal change; Christianity is a historical phenomenon. No doubt Hegelianism spoke of Christianity, interpreted by dialectic, as absolute in the unconditioned Divine sense—at least it did so at intervals, with no great consistency; but this was because Hegel construed Christianity on evolutionary lines as the net result of a process which the Absolute must traverse in order to realise its own being. Christianity on this reading is absolute for the reason that God's own absoluteness could not embrace the whole world of finitude, resolving it in Himself, unless His self-consciousness had reached full being through, *inter alia*, the Christian movement. That movement is essential to God's being fully God, it mediates His complete reality. The question may legitimately be raised whether these ideas are truly theistic, let alone Christian; at all events it is not the meaning of 'absolute' I am now contending for.

Nor does that term denote some merely formal or external characteristic, as when we say that Christianity is supernaturally revealed, or has a miraculous origin, or is universally normative, or even that it *claims* to be final. All these statements, it is possible, have a perfectly good

sense; but we must not forget that the same claims are emphatically made by Judaism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism. It is doubtful whether a living religion could be found which did not assert its own absoluteness, or which would not slowly perish if the assertion were given up. Each real faith must regard itself as true, supernatural, revealed. Hence the Christian religion, when fully self-conscious, must do something more than point to inspired books or divinely attested prophets. Its absoluteness must lie in its own vital content, in the actual significance of the Gospel; and this really means that any faith which challenges the finality of Christianity must produce the equivalent of Jesus Christ. He, as we have already seen, embodies the Gospel in Himself, and in Him its own finality, if real, must be found. To call Christianity the absolute or final religion, therefore, is to contend not merely that in Jesus Christ God is presented in a form higher and more spiritually satisfying than elsewhere, but that the relationship to the Father on which believers thus enter is such that it cannot be transcended. Absoluteness, that is, is definable apart from its conditions by reference simply to the meaning of the Gospel. The evidence of the finality of the Christian message coincides with the evidence of its truth, and lies in a disclosure of truth concerning God which thenceforward verifies itself in experience.

Returning to the proposition 'Christianity is absolute,' let us note this time the ambiguity of the subject. 'Christianity' has two chief meanings. First, it means the presentation of Divine love, pardon and fellowship given in and through the personal experience of Jesus. Here it stands for a transcendent gift—call it revelation or reconciliation or what you will; at all events, it is that in Jesus to which faith responds and in which it finds God. On the other hand, it constantly means not the Divine gift but the human reaction, the Christian life as exhibited by men. In this sense we speak familiarly of the Christianity

of the apostolic age, mediaeval Christianity, the Christianity of the future. Orthodox and unorthodox freely use the term in this sense. And not seldom, in debating the absoluteness of Christianity, we get hopelessly to cross-purposes owing to this duplicity of meaning.

For clearly, in the second sense just described, Christianity as a form of human faith and life can never attain final expression. Here the absolute religion traverses history ; its very essence, that in it which makes it absolute, not merely tolerates but demands and produces an evolution. The initial impulse, charged with infinite freedom of movement, is capable of boundless change and must undergo an ever-renewed adaptation if it is not to perish. In this sense there has never been a perfect form of Christianity. St. Paul confessed that he had not attained, and Christianity did not cease to be modified and developed when the apostles passed away. Perfect faith, love, and obedience are reserved for a life beyond space and time. If absolute means ' complete,' the New Testament itself discards the notion of an absolute Christianity as a possible phenomenon within the present order, and carries on the prophetic mind to the far-off day when the Church shall be made perfect in heavenly places. In this aspect it has been aptly said that the finality of our religion really consists in its endless capacity of growth and self-renewal. The differentia of Christianity is to be at once final and interminably progressive. It does not educate men beyond itself, but it unceasingly educates them *in* itself. Here as always growth is no accident or difficulty, but the natural sign of life.

Various objections to the absolute character of Christianity, it appears, are really due to a failure to make clear this distinction between the Gospel as a Divine self-presentation and the responsive, specifically Christian form of belief and conduct. In the latter signification of Christianity the claim to absoluteness ought not to be raised ; we may go further and contend that if a mere fragment

of the long corporate experience of humanity had exhausted the power of Christ, the fact would itself be an unanswerable refutation of His finality.

But now, recurring to the first meaning of the word 'Christianity,' I should argue that the Divine gift offered in Christ *is* complete and perfect, and that this forms an ultimate conviction of the Christian mind. Through the Gospel we become possessors of a religious boon than which nothing better or higher can be thought of. It is just because the innermost meaning of Christ is unsurpassable that He is able to reveal Himself afresh to ever new generations. The personal presence of God in Jesus for our redemption is something that admits of no increase of value, nor can we think of anything more significant than Jesus' life and death as the cost of forgiveness to the Father How could there be a qualitatively higher relationship to God than the sonship into which Jesus leads ? And how could we be assured of this relationship, without diminution of intimacy or moral authority, except through One who is not merely a symbol of Divine love but God's presence in this real world ? In short, we cannot think Christ away and yet have the same God that we have in Him. When once we have understood what is meant by calling Jesus the Mediator we know, without reasoning, that He can have neither rival nor successor, and that a plurality of such wholly transparent media of the Divine mind toward the sinful is intrinsically as inconceivable as a plurality of Gods. Every attempt to elaborate in thought a higher kind of revelation than the Christian or a better attitude to God than that of sonship in Jesus eventually reaches a point at which it abrogates the specific character of religion as a form of human experience, and renders it indistinguishable from nature-mysticism or morality. Certainly to interpret Christ better is possible, to grasp the object of faith with a surer hand and apply its principles more effectively to the rebuilding of society on the foundation

of God's will is an infinitely urgent necessity; but this is not merely compatible with but derives from the certainty that the Christian revelation is ultimate, in the sense that it cannot be superseded.[1] The watchword of the Reformation, 'by faith alone,' is but a variant of this conviction, and perhaps the most unchristian thing in Romanism is that beside the religious absoluteness of Jesus Christ it has dared to set the absoluteness of the Papal Church.

The consciousness of this final character was from the first native to the new religion. Every page of the New Testament is here on our side. Jesus calls all the weary to Himself and leads them to the Father—not to some point at which the prospect opens of a future possession of God, but to His very presence. In His own eyes He is the Bringer of perfect fellowship with the Father, the Kingdom of God up to its transcendent fulfilment is indissolubly linked with Him, and the Divine purpose reaches its goal in a gift that is infinite, victorious, eternal. 'No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.'[2] The apostles went out to preach redemption exclusively through Christ, and one mode in which the finality of the message certified itself was that He proved adequate for all. In their teaching we can read the certainty that now at last, in the Christian society, the long-hidden mystery of God was unveiled, antiquating once for all every distinction

[1] People often disparage this as merely theological 'old-fogyism,' as if all that mattered were that in the Christian experience we should be conscious of moving in the right direction. Troeltsch himself occasionally shows a tendency to put things this way, as when he says that 'absoluteness' in the proper sense means simply that Christianity is the highest known religion, and implies 'the certainty that we have entered on the path to the perfect truth' (*Absolutheit*, p. 92). But this is a misinterpretation of faith. The quality of faith alters for the worse if the idea be admitted that so far we are only heading in the right direction, but have not yet attained. That is to turn Christianity again into a religion of hope, like Judaism, and obscure its native sense of real possession. Cf. St. Paul's words: 'Through Him we have had (and have) our access into this grace wherein we stand' (Rom. v. 2).

[2] Matt. xi. 27.

of sex or rank or nation or civilisation or religious faith. In the Epistle to the Ephesians the Church is pictured as the mystical fellowship representing the final unity of all things, and it is assumed that 'men can thus unite in the truth of Christ because it is the absolute truth, which lies at the very heart of things.'[1] In Hebrews over against the shadows of the Law is placed the supreme reality disclosed in Jesus, beyond which there can be no advance. Thus alone can men find immediate, unrestricted access to God, for Christ's achievement is of lasting and all-sufficient validity. In the Fourth Gospel, and still more decisively in the First Epistle of John, it is declared by obvious implication that Christianity is the final religion, the absolute standard of faith and life, because it stands alone in proclaiming without reserve that God is love and life, and that this life is in His Son. New Testament eschatology, with its expectation of an immediate End, is also a transient expression of faith in the absoluteness of the revelation contained in the Gospel, the uniqueness of Jesus, the infinitude of redemption. So, too, when the Church Fathers argued that Greek philosophers had borrowed from the Bible, they were offering a confused witness to the same belief. This conviction of having in Jesus the one thing needful has gone with the Church through history, rising always into keener urgency when the fires of missionary zeal begin afresh to burn and shine. If the past can prove anything, it does prove that assurance of its own finality is a part of Christian faith. The point is one on which the believing consciousness has never been able to bear the least ambiguity. No other religion lays such stress on the claim to be the religion of humanity; none, accordingly, has in the same fashion made missionary activity a principle of its life.

The two most important discussions of our problem

[1] Scott, *The Apologetic of the New Testament*, p. 191.

in modern times are probably those of Schleiermacher and, a hundred years later, Troeltsch. In his famous fifth 'Address,' Schleiermacher raised the question of the absoluteness of Christianity, answering it cautiously for the moment, but speaking more confidently as time went on. Troeltsch has, if anything, moved in the opposite direction. His expressions have grown more reserved. He rejects with great emphasis the Ritschlian statement of the case for finality, on the ground that Ritschlians have never really faced the problems and demands of the historic method. They tend, he complains, to take some Biblical segment of the past, such as the personality of Jesus, and make it a holy island in the sea of change—to represent it, that is to say, as fenced off inviolably from profane history, and thus to 'absolutise' its origins in the sense of withdrawing them from the action of ordinary secular forces. He speaks indeed of the Ritschlian argument as a whole with a contempt which the varied obscurities and imperfections of his own powerful exposition hardly justify, dismissing it cavalierly as a thing of shreds and patches, of half-tones and makeshifts.

He then proceeds to argue that Christianity, considered in the light of the philosophy of history, must be ranked simply as the highest religion 'up to date.' More we cannot say. The world is ever moving on to new, unguessed combinations of faith and love. It is axiomatic that history cannot contain either an absolute religion or an absolute personality. That which is absolute is always something transcendent, which must be conceived of as either the source of the entire cosmic movement or its goal; but whatever enters the field of time is thereby revealed as temporary, contingent, relative. It acts and reacts with its environment, filling an appointed place within the ceaselessly moving stream of change. Primitive Christianity is indissolubly bound up with the eschatological hope, and the Christianity of the early Catholic Church with contemporary philosophic thought. Nor can we

use the tempting distinction of husk and kernel; to think of an absolute ideal realised in historical form is as much as to think of a red-hot ball in a waxen casing. As Strauss puts it: 'The Idea loves not to pour all its fulness in a single instance.'

Nevertheless, when all is said, he cordially admits that Christianity is the best religion in the world of the distinctively personalistic type and forms a point of convergence for all previous lines of the highest religious development, not merely combining in itself the highest things in the past but opening a new era of advance. But, as he again reminds us, all this furnishes no guarantee of its finality. We cannot prescribe to the future. No scientific demonstration could possibly be given that Christianity is the end of God's ways with men, and that some day it may not be outstripped by a better revelation, a richer faith which first creates and then satisfies needs of which as yet we can form no conception but which, once felt, will be recognised as self-evidencing. Who can be sure that the civilisation of Europe and America will last for ever? How can we tell whether the bonds uniting our religious life to Jesus may not in time be snapped? Nothing is really absolute but God and His Kingdom. The notion that what is absolute could be localised in history, or apprehended by minds which history itself has fashioned, is, however venial, a complete illusion. The methodological principles of criticism, analogy, and correlativity, which historical research has no option but to use, forbid the thought.

Troeltsch has been widely censured for this general argumentation, which no doubt is not in all points satisfactory; but there is at least one element of his view which we need have no scruple in adopting. He is surely right, though of course not at all singular, in urging that the claim of our religion to finality can never be established by any technical historical investigation, just because everything amenable to treatment by

scientific history is thereby qualified as individual and relative. In other words, pure history is bound to leave the door open for the possible advent of a higher faith. The scientific discipline of evaluation, call it history or philosophy, can do no more than pronounce Christianity the highest point so far attained. Criticism, dealing with past events, of necessity reduces certitude to the level of a more or less high probability ; the law of analogy excludes the possibility that the past anywhere can show a genuinely unique factor ; the principle of correlativity must explain all things by the immanent causal nexus of the world, a nexus untouched by the action of supernatural forces. Hence we need not look to scientific historical research for a constraining proof that Christianity is final. Thus far, we may assume, every one must go along with Troeltsch who understands what modern scientific method is.

But two important considerations must be borne in mind. First of all, the science of history in question is a special science, which means that, like all special sciences, it operates with concepts whose value and scope is purely relative. These concepts may be, and are, quite unfit to express the nature of spiritual experience as a whole. The account they give is not exhaustive. Each science, the experts agree, must have its range delimited by certain initial assumptions ; further—and this is what matters—anything not falling under these assumptions must be treated by the science in view as non-existent. Clearly, then, no method in the world can decide upon *facts*. The scientific historian certainly has a right to say : I cannot, *qua* historian, take cognisance of an alleged final revelation of God in Christ, for in my work I am necessarily guided by what are purely relative principles. But he has no right to add : Therefore no such final revelation can have happened. Just as the physicist is bound to apply the principles of his science so as to leave room for morality and freedom, so the historian is bound to apply his specific

principles in a form that does not peremptorily exclude the possibility of a unique influence of Jesus. Suppose the historian to be a convinced Christian, what then? Is he incapable of really scientific work? He has found God in Christ in an ultimate and complete revelation: does he thereby forfeit the intellectual respect of his colleagues? Or is not the fact rather that he has discovered a cardinal truth at which others may arrive by other paths, viz. that on many subjects scientific history cannot speak the last word? It cannot even explain St. Paul or Luther; what wonder if it fail to cope with the incomparable fact of Jesus? To repeat it once more: heuristic methods cannot settle what is or what is not possible, for by definition these methods are careful generalisations formed by study of the normal case.

Secondly, we have to ask why Christianity should be singled out for this objection that it cannot be of absolute value just because it is entangled in history. Is not morality in the same case? The irreducible distinction between persons and things is now an accepted principle of the higher ethics, but it was not always so. It is a conviction which emerged in historical ways and through historical media. But if men became aware of the unconditional value of ethical personality through past experiences, while yet the historical origins of any such intuition leave its absolute character unaffected, and we decline to 'relativise' it merely because its content has had a history, Christian faith may surely claim equality of treatment. Here is an absolute morality which has come to light through the processes of the human past; may not an absolute religion also rise to view? May it not be that in neither case we can really think the absoluteness away except by abstracting from the vital conditions of our existence?

Again, it is too often forgotten that the finality of the Christian religion is of interest solely to theists. No one else would deem it worth discussion. But is not theism

also the fruit of history? It has arisen in time. If evolution demands a higher than Christianity, a higher than theism is not less necessary. As Mr. Whitaker has expressed it, 'To take "God" as a fixed, ascertained, once-for-all-settled idea, while you take Christianity as a passing phase or embodiment of that idea, is quite illogical.' After all, we could assign no value or relevance to a theism which was devoid of living connection with human life in its past unfolding. To cut the bonds linking the theistic faith to the events and experiences of human life would be to relapse hopelessly upon the so-called ideas of pure reason, about which no two thinkers have ever agreed for half an hour together. Notoriously there exists no such thing as 'pure reason' in that vacuous and beggarly sense. Reason has become what it is through historical changes, through the influence of personalities upon each other; and to hold that the specific influence of Jesus has had the effect of giving responsive minds a perfectly satisfying and eternally valid apprehension of God is nothing more than the supreme instance of a principle operative everywhere. 'The aversion to history and historical considerations as a source of our belief,' says the writer I have just quoted, 'is a piece of intellectual cowardice: it is one method of running away from the world in which God has placed us and the task he has given us. For we are placed in a world of human, historical conditions. It is part of our life's business to construe that world of history. What we think of it does most materially affect all our beliefs and shape our thought about God, about morals, about the nature of the soul and about human destiny. . . . There is an inherent fallacy in the notion that you must use your God-given reason in thinking about thought, but you must not trust it to think about the historical manifestations which alone make thought important and vital to our own interests. It is true that a believer is at the mercy of any one who can prove to him that his history is all wrong. But a simple Theist is also at the mercy

of any one who can prove to him that his reasoning about God is all wrong. . . . We have to use both our reasoning intellect and historical knowledge. That this is so may be proved in one sentence, thus: A man's religious outlook upon moral and religious possibilities is vastly altered according as he believes or does not believe that Jesus lived in perfect holiness with God. Take either side upon this historical question, and your view of the range of possible human achievement, and many other things, is at once decisively affected.' [1] In short, we have no option but to face the adventurous duty of relating our faith positively to history, and the attempt to shirk it leads inevitably to the impoverishment and atrophy of our noblest powers.

It is unnecessary to spend time in the inquiry whether Evolution as such is hostile to finality. Evolution as a theory is not hostile to anything, but only a description of what happens. Nor, again, is Evolution itself mere random change: rather it moves on definite lines, and in a multitude of cases proceeds, after a certain point, to perfect and develop some new form. It is doubtful whether any one expects the horse to change hereafter through evolution into something that is not a horse but higher, or man to give place to superman. Similarly, as the development of man now consists in his being more of a man, so the development of Christianity will consist in its becoming its characteristic self more and more fully, expressing its nature with an ever-increased completeness. It will be applied in ever new directions, but it will not change its nature or begin to draw upon a radically different source of inspiration. We need no more expect the future to provide a better religion, simply on the ground that Evolution must go on, and ever new types of religious experience must be inaugurated, than we expect new kinds of morality to be produced indefinitely. The ideas of 'right' and 'good' have come to stay, because

[1] *The Finality of the Christian Religion*, pp. 7-10.

once we have understood their meaning we see they cannot be improved on. In no other sense, but undoubtedly in this sense, we are entitled to say that Jesus' presentation of the Father and His consequent bestowal of the filial spirit on men has ultimate and eternal value. By affirming the 'absoluteness' of Christianity we mean that in dealing with Jesus we are dealing with God Himself; there was in Him a Divine redemptive life transcending the limits of His own and every later time.

Scientific history, as we have seen, is unequal to the task of recognising an absolute personality. But then (and this is the really important thing) no man is a mere historian, even if he tries to be. For no man is without a conscience—the sense of unconditional and infallible obligation; hence none of us can be guaranteed against the risk of finding ourselves in the presence of One who deals with us in ways which we know to be God's ways. It may happen to any man, at any time, given the witness of a living Church, to be inescapably confronted with a Person who convicts him of moral ruin yet offers him the saving love of God. And if this should happen, he will then know, with a certainty which no history can give or take away, that in this Jesus he has touched and met with God.

Assuming, then, that scientific history cannot give us all we want, while yet the crucial reality must lie within the sphere of historic fact, let us now mark the cardinal truth that the absoluteness or finality of the Christian religion can only be perceived and appreciated in faith. We affirm it as a personal conviction quite compatible with the impartial study of other faiths, yet at bottom a conviction evoked solely by contact with the special values present in Jesus. The trust that Christ is final can no more than the trust that He is real be produced by theoretical and constraining argument; we name Him absolute because in experience we recognise Him

as the ultimate Divine answer to man's individual and social needs. There is one sense in which we may still claim to *prove* this absoluteness; that is, we can show that absoluteness is involved in the meaning of the Gospel. We can analyse Christian experience, and exhibit the persuasion that Jesus is final as one of its constitutive elements. It may no doubt be said that this is to assume the Christian experience, and therefore argue in a circle; but the charge is one which strikes equally at ethics, which assumes the fact of ethical life, and even at science, which can only begin its work by assuming the experience of nature. In all three cases the mind is dealing with the given.

Now the Christian thinker cannot afford to surrender this conviction at the supposed challenge of the Comparative Science of Religions, merely to please a whim of intellectualism. To abandon the finality of the Gospel would rob faith of its assurance that we have the highest good in Christ alone, and thus reintroduce that old fatal note of uncertainty about the character of God which had crept into mediaeval piety and was overcome only by the great Reformation message of free Divine grace. To treat the ultimate religious worth of Jesus as an open question, by reducing Him to the level of the prophets, is to alter the characteristic tone of Christian piety subtly but radically. Were Jesus no more than He has often been pictured in the literature of Liberal Protestantism, then indeed we might well hope that He would be superseded, since in that case we could quite easily imagine a better revelation of God. We could imagine a revelation of God which is perfect because the Revealer *is* what He reveals, because in Him God is personally present, redeeming at His own cost. But Jesus has been called absolute on the ground that precisely this is what Christians have found in Him, this something beyond which faith and imagination cannot go; whereas in other worships, even the noblest, a shadow still hangs over the Father's face.

This, be it noted, is not an argument that Christianity stands to all other religions in the bare ratio of full possession to unsatisfied desire. On the contrary, wherever men have sought, there, we must believe, they have in part found. The Father disclosed in Jesus could not leave such prayers unheard. Nevertheless, both desire and possession exist in varied degrees of completeness, and in Christ the trust-evoking reality is such a manifestation of God as puts all spiritual good within our reach. Not only so; but every excellence in another religion is the signal of, and the challenge to discover, a deeper worth in Christianity. It is significant that so many high-minded votaries of non-Christian faiths eventually become dissatisfied, because increasingly conscious of needs still craving an adequate object, as well as of spiritual powers still unexercised; but no man has yet been found to complain that he had exhausted the interest of Jesus, or measured His redemptive powers.

For Christianity, then, the problem of its own absoluteness is one of life and death. If there may be a better way to God, and we feel this, we cannot be sure the Christian way may not have led us wrong. If a future Gospel may bring men nearer God, are we then at all in touch with Him? Dilemmas are odious, but there appears to be no escape from this one: Either we have in Christ something less than complete certainty of God, which means the readjustment of all our religious estimates, or it is actually complete certainty that we do have, therefore Christianity is the final faith.

This is often repudiated as involving a cold or narrow-hearted attitude to ethnic faiths, but it is not too much to say that the exact reverse is the truth.[1] If Christianity

[1] It is not inconceivable, indeed, that a man might discover for the first time through contact with pious Mohammedans or Buddhists the real meaning and claims of absolute dependence or perfect self-surrender, and be stirred thereby to find these things more satisfyingly in Jesus Christ. This might be the actual order of events in the story of his conversion.

is *the* world-religion, its function is to satisfy the longings which these other faiths express, and to lead on the powers which those faiths are using to their fuller development and loftier employment. The climax guarantees the partial truth of earlier stages. It is when Christ is viewed as the full answer to man's prayer for life that we can appreciate with genuine sympathy all older forms of the same prayer, for now we know the real object of their yearnings; and the pathos of those ethnic supplications, their profound beauty, their moral daring, their inspired and persistent trust make their right impression. The true light is now shining, and by its gleam we can mark the upward progress of man's soul. Hence, the place to be given to the great religious teachers of the world must be measured from that of Jesus Christ. The value of Judaism, Parsism, Buddhism and the rest is, in the last resort, the value vouched for and countersigned by the Gospel. 'If,' it has been well said, 'in the idea of Nirvana Buddha was attempting to state the Christian doctrine of eternal life, an existence to be attained by dying to self, then it is a doctrine we can be thankful for. But if it is to be set side by side with the Christian doctrine, as of equal truth, it invites an unfair comparison and becomes the most pessimistic and pernicious idea in the world.' [1]

Obedience, after all, is the organ of spiritual knowledge; and in the present context this signifies that it is only through the perpetual conflict of mission enterprise that the Church can keep its great assurance that Christianity is ultimate. Were it to despair of the missionary cause; it would instantly lose that life-giving insight. We can appeal to the best missionaries at this point. They are agreed in testifying that belief in the finality of the Christian Gospel is the one practicable basis of their special work. Evangelisation becomes reasonable and effective only through the faith that the message of Jesus supersedes the past by fulfilling its noblest hopes and completing

[1] Orchard, *The Necessity of Christ*, pp. 60-1.

its best achievements. Evidence comes in from all the fields to prove the vital necessity for missionary work of the truth of the absoluteness of the Christian revelation. 'Everywhere,' says Professor D. S. Cairns, 'this is what arouses opposition, but everywhere it is what wins men. . . . It is precisely because of the strength of their conviction as to the absoluteness of Christianity that our correspondents find it possible to take the more generous view of the non-Christian religions.' [1] The conviction is surely one which it would be unreasonable to put aside on academic grounds, as though the proper reserve of the scientific historian were a better index of the potentialities of the Divine order than the consenting experience of all Christian pioneers.

Nothing really so confirms a man's antecedent belief in the finality of the Christian faith as the great venture of going out with it in his hand into dark continents, to face there the best which other religions have accomplished. Christianity, in short, is absolute if it dares to be so. The persuasion of its supremacy is not something that can be attained once and for all either by the Church or the individual Christian, entered correctly in a creed or private notebook, and left thenceforward to maintain itself in life and power. No: we lose the truth except as we continually regain it, fighting the good fight of faith with decisive and fearless trust. The great certitude that Christ is final belongs not to the sensible men, but to the martyrs—to all who are willing to spend and be spent to the utmost in a cause greater than life itself.

[1] *Reports of World Missionary Conference* (1910), pp. 242, 268.

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